

THE BARRIER

RENÉ BAZIN

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BY
RENÉ BAZIN

AUTHOR OF "THE NUN," "REDEMPTION," "THE
COMING HARVEST," "THIS, MY SON," ETC.



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I

ON the smooth-shaven lawn of the Westgate-on-Sea Tennis Club where a tournament was in progress, the final match had just begun between a pair of teams, each consisting of four men and as many girls. *Team* was an appropriate name for these groups of amateurs of the racket and ball, whom society so carefully distinguishes from professionals but who resembled them closely at this moment, not only in the skill and rapidity of their play, but in their complete absorption in the game and in the spirit of comradeship which precluded the slightest hint of gallantry or coquetry between the men and girls. All played alike with an ardour befitting the champions of a long-practised art, with keen pride in a clever stroke on either side, and with an eager emulation far surpassing the mere sense of youthful enjoyment, and preventing all interchange of idle words. At one end of the tennis-ground, in the shade of a high hedge, a throng of spectators were gathered, mostly women, and including the usual contingent of poor but high-born British spinsters.

Two or three of the acknowledged leaders of county society presided over this assemblage and appeared to be holding a sort of semi-regal court, to which had flocked numbers of summer residents from the villas along the shore, not from Westgate only, but from Deal, Berchington, and other pleasant nooks of this county of Kent renowned for its bracing air and equable climate. All seemed to know one another, either as members of the tennis club or as invited guests, and to constitute, for the time being, an exclusive coterie to which many of them were, evidently, proud to belong.

An animated talk was going on among the players who had already taken part in the match, and who now clustered around one of the ladies whom they greeted with joyous exclamations of, "Oh, Lady Breynolds, I'm sure Reginald will win!"

Having thus paid their respects to her, all turned their steps towards a temporary booth erected in the centre of the lawn, where tea was being served.

The lady so addressed was seated in a low garden-chair; her figure, which still retained the slenderness of youth, was set off by a close-fitting costume of dark-blue serge, her chestnut hair was coiled about her head in heavy braids, after the fashion of an earlier day; and though approaching her fiftieth year, she was still beautiful, with classic regularity of features, and a marked air of distinction.

Her face, which in repose was somewhat cold

and reserved, with little play of expression, evinced a lifelong habit of self-control and a sense of her own dignity befitting so finished a type of the great lady.

Yet her greeting was not wanting in grace, owing to a pretty fashion she had of inclining her head to one side as she bestowed on each guest in turn a rapid, penetrating glance which seemed to say: "Oh, yes. I recognise you. I recall perfectly your name, your family, the very words we exchanged when we met, a week, two months, a year ago. All these things concerning you have the honour of being imprinted on the memory of Cecilia, Lady Breynolds."

With the little circle surrounding her who may, for the moment, have fancied themselves admitted to her intimacy, her tone was easy, even playful, and her clear laugh revealed the candid simplicity of her nature. The talk among the ladies was confined to light comment on the scene before them. From time to time Lady Breynolds turned to watch her son, who was taking part in the final match, and as she did so her light blue eyes, scarcely veiled by their blond lashes, wore an eager look of maternal pride and admiration, and as the close of the game approached her gaze never left that part of the field where Reginald was playing. He was, however, far too absorbed in the match to return her glance.

All conversation had now ceased, while the women bent eagerly forward beneath their sunshades, and the men, seated cross-legged on the

grass at their feet, watched each turn of the game with set lips and contracted brows.

In this breathless silence, broken only by the buzz and whir of a passing automobile, the thud of the balls was distinctly audible. Suddenly there was a burst of cheers and a clapping of hands, not too loud, however, to befit so select a company.

Then followed shouts of, "Bravo, Reginald! Well done, old fellow!" while the air rang with his name, and one connoisseur remarked to another: "His play reminds me of Alfred Lyttleton's; the same quickness and precision. What a pity he is ordered back to India so soon! He would certainly win the championship."

As Reginald Breynolds made his last successful shot amid shouts of triumph, a brief smile crossed his serious face, and seemed to express a momentary sense of the joy of life, of delight in the spring sunshine and the fresh sea-breezes blowing across the hedge of laurels. He looked around for the girl who had shared his victory, not, indeed, as an equal, but as a friendly and zealous ally, and gaily waved his thanks to her. Then his face resumed its habitual gravity as, drawing on the coat which a comrade was holding out to him, and tightening his belt, he crossed the field with a long, easy stride, overtopping by half a head the admiring group who followed him.

On reaching his mother's side, he pressed the hand she held out to him in a close, tender grasp which spoke more eloquently than words, while

her glances conveyed the exact degree of sentiment which she allowed herself to display in public, permissible surely in the mother of so handsome and popular a son.

"I am proud of you," was all she said, "and delighted at your success."

She rose slowly as she spoke, closing her tortoise-shell lorgnette and slipping it into her belt; then with a glance at her special intimates inviting them to follow her, and including the rest of the circle in a slight bow, she made her stately progress towards the tea-table.

There the tennis-players had already gathered in knots of twos and threes, and the girls were passing tea, while the men, having laid aside their rackets, were growing conscious at last that they had pretty companions.

Etiquette being postponed until dinner, they were still merely comrades in sport, and the men were free to stretch themselves out at full length on the grass, to talk or keep silence. They showed, in fact, little eagerness for conversation, but listened idly to the chat of the girls in their bright-hued *bérets*, confining themselves to monosyllables or an occasional jest in reply and leaving colloquial efforts to those weaker vessels who spoil serious sport and whose real mission in life is to amuse the superior sex. They indulged in no compliments, but when a girl, prettier or more spirited than the rest, chanced to raise her arms to rearrange her disordered locks or lingered near one of them to offer a cup of tea or to discuss some act of prowess in the game, a gleam of pleas-

ure might be seen lighting up the eyes of these young conquerors.

"I hope, Reginald," said his mother, "that you have congratulated Mlle. Marie Limerel. She played so well," and as her son nodded a careless assent she added warmly:

"Yes, excessively well; admirably."

"As well as an English girl, Madame?" inquired a low, musical voice in which there lurked a shade of irony. Insignificant as were the words, something in the modulations of the voice revealed a harmonious nature. Reginald, who was deep in conversation with a friend, a heavy youth in a plaid cap, with the air of a groom, glanced from his mother to the girl who had just spoken, and replied: "Not better than an English girl, but quite differently, and extremely well, as you say, mother," and having uttered these words in a tone of constrained politeness, the young soldier resumed his talk with his friend, Thomas Winne, a young man who concealed brilliant scientific attainments beneath an unprepossessing exterior. To him Reginald was relating reminiscences of his garrison life in India, of which an occasional word caught the ear: "As I was saying, I had bought a half-breed collie from a native, and found him hard to train." And as the crowd around the tea-table was constantly shifting he took no further part in the general conversation.

Daylight lingers long on these late spring days in England, but the sun was now setting and its level rays shed a flood of golden light over the

waves along the shore, over the quivering tops of the hedgerows, and the fair heads of the girls around the tea-table, and as Marie Limerel rose to take her leave she, too, was enveloped in this flood of splendour. Lady Breynolds who, without being an artist, was keenly alive to beauty, exclaimed: "Look, Dorothy, at the brunette Marie transformed into a Venetian blonde! How wonderful!"

"It may be wonderful, but it's not at all becoming," replied the young lady thus addressed, a slight creature of twenty with the eyes of a gazelle and a rose-orchid complexion, who had been playing a dozen games of tennis with the energy and endurance of an athlete, and was now reclining lazily in a wicker easy-chair.

"You are very hard to please," rejoined Lady Breynolds.

And, in fact, in this sunset light, the French girl's rich brown hair piled in wavy masses above her brow seemed to be crowned with red autumn foliage and strange-hued seaweeds. It was but a momentary effect as she stood with the dazzle of sunlight in her eyes and a smile on her lips, holding out her hand to Lady Breynolds; then she drew back into the shadow of the hedge.

Reginald turned as Mlle. Limerel rose to take leave, and before offering his hand hastily raised his tennis cap, as if in deference to French custom. Others in the group called out good-byes to the departing girl, and such is the spell of a certain grace of bearing and movement that the talk ceased for a moment round the table as all turned

to watch her departure. The sunset glow had already faded, but the evening light fell full on her tall, lithe figure, outlining the curve of her slender throat, cream-white as the petals of a magnolia, and the firmly rounded cheek, with its mantling colour, eloquent of pure race and high spirit, as, with the light, rhythmic step which betokens character and decision, she moved swiftly away.

The company now began to disperse, Lady Breynolds having been summoned by a groom, and at last Reginald and his friend were left in solitary possession of the field. The two young men were still deep in talk, or rather Reginald talked while Winne was an intent and motionless listener, confining himself to an occasional question or a murmur of assent. His head was bent forward and his cheeks were flushed as if with the effort his sluggish imagination was making to keep pace with his friend's narrative. He rarely raised his eyes to Reginald's face, but when he did so it was with a look of complete devotion and loyalty towards this friend, who sat recounting his Indian adventures with head thrown back and keen gaze fixed on the horizon.

"It was rough work, then?" queried Winne.

"Rough indeed! I was sent, the only white officer, in command of a detachment of the Sixteenth Rajput Regiment on a reconnaissance into the higher valleys of Assam. The region is quite unexplored, with magnificent scenery, but terrible from the torrential rains which almost wash away the mountains, and from the ferocity of the

Mongol population who hate the English, despise the Hindoos, and are constantly fighting among themselves. It is a country of dense forests and jungles, with a tropical growth of giant ferns and creepers, camellias and laurels, forming an almost impenetrable tangle of tough, glittering, prickly foliage. We plunged into these thickets, and after three weeks of constant effort we were able to set up our camp and give the men a chance to rest. We encamped amid the ruins of an old fort in a hollow, bowl-shaped valley. One side of this natural fortress was formed by the massive blocks of some very ancient building, doubtless a temple; the other three sides we repaired and strengthened by stakes driven into the ground and huge tree trunks bound together with stout creepers. A narrow stream flowed through the valley, just below the camp. We had sent out scouts in all directions, but found no cause for alarm; they brought back reports of seeing only a few scattered huts, and a solitary native here and there who fled at their approach. I profited by this apparent tranquillity to explore the country, leaving my small force of thirty men under command of a sergeant known as Mulvaney, after Kipling's hero."

"Yes, I remember. Had Kipling ever visited that region?"

"No, I was the first Englishman who had penetrated so far. I set out with an escort of two men, hunting as we went. We crossed a high pass and descended into another valley, much wider than the first, evidently peopled and partly

cultivated. Here we were greeted by a European, a missionary, who had been living for twenty years among this people, unknown to the outer world, or at least to Assam."

"An Englishman?"

"No, a Frenchman, and a Roman Catholic. He had succeeded in partly civilising a native population of several thousands, had built a church, laid out roads, and cleared the land for a wide space around the village.

"He was a tall thin man, with a grizzled beard. I spent two days with him, not under his roof, however, for he lodged in the poorest hut in the village, while he quartered me with one of the wealthier natives until we entered the jungle. What a hunt he gave me! You have heard of those battues in India where they drive wild beasts of all sorts into an enclosure, a regular Noe's Ark! After the game had been driven in by a troop of beaters, shouting and waving flags, we were posted near the only outlet; we had barely time to load our muskets and fire before the mad rush of infuriated wild beasts was upon us, a leaping, roaring mass of every coat and colour."

"Did the missionary fire, too?"

"He did, indeed, and never missed a shot. I saw stags and lynxes, hares, foxes, and a tiger, which your humble servant shot. I saw wild boars too, and in the midst of this mad rush I caught sight of two men creeping by close at our feet, and emerging, three paces off, in the jungle. If they had chosen—but I was under special protection. It was royal sport, such as few hunters

of big game have known or are likely to know. But two days later——”

“The sport was fiercer still, was it?”

“It was, indeed. I got back to camp none too soon. The entire population had gathered in our rear and were about to attack us. We were hemmed in by an enemy far more dangerous than the wild beasts we had slain in the jungle. For a fortnight we stood a siege in that block-house, defended only by trunks of trees and loose masses of rock. For assailants we had hunger, thirst, and the hot season in addition to the incessant attacks of a numerous and active foe, and I saw our end rapidly approaching.

“Suddenly, one morning, a band of unexpected allies flung themselves on the savages and made their way into our camp. They were led by the abbé, whom I recognised a long way off by his height and his movements. He brought us supplies, and I owe it to him that I am here at this moment. But when I attempted to express my gratitude, I was met by the most singular refusal I have ever encountered.”

“What did you offer him?” asked Winne.

“Whatever he wanted. I began by proposing an indemnity.”

“Well, what did he say to that?”

“He merely laughed. I then suggested drawing up a report to my chief and obtaining a pecuniary reward for him as well as an official acknowledgment from the British government. Then he grew serious and said: ‘No, my friend, no honours for me.’”

"I next offered to call the attention of the French government to his noble action, upon which he laid his hand upon my arm and interrupted me in a harsh tone, but with tears in his eyes.

"Imagine us both perched in a sort of niche in the wall, a haunt for bats hollowed out of the roof of a temple so ancient that its sculptures could no longer be distinguished from fissures in the stones. Our feet hung over the abyss as we sat there, gazing down into the valley beneath, from which rose an odour of carnage mingled with blossoms.

"We were the leaders, and as I listened to my soldiers singing at their supper in the woods fifty feet below us, I was tasting the first joy of our rescue. Finally silence set in, with only the blue vault of the night sky around us.

"I was filled with a deep sense of gratitude towards our rescuer, a man so brave and so devoid of ambition; but at last I began to resent his refusal and to urge upon him the point of honour which did not permit me to regard the safety of my men and my own as so trifling a matter. I grew angry and must have said something that wounded him, for when I ended he replied:

"It is well. You force me to make a cruel confession. I have deserved it, but I beg you to keep the secret of my name. For a score of years I have lived amongst this people; I hope to die in their service. But before coming out to India, for the space of several months in Europe, I was an unworthy priest. I sinned against the vows of my Order—my whole life since then has been an expiation. . . . You understand now,

my friend, that I have no wish to lessen the rigour of this expiation. Suffer me to take my leave of you. You can never remember me now without remembering my fall, and you have forced me to feel shame rather than pride in the service I have been able to render you. But it is better so. Good-bye.' The next day he left us, and I never saw him again; but I own to you, my dear fellow, that I was deeply moved by this meeting."

"What does it prove?" exclaimed Winne. "That there are Roman Catholic priests who do not keep their vows!"

"It proves rather the opposite," Reginald answered, "since such expiations, purely voluntary, follow on sin— But no, you cannot understand it. You would have to look into those deep eyes of his, hollowed out by tears, like stones on the beach washed for ever by the tide. I was brought face to face with the mystery of purification. I felt myself infinitely beneath him. I saw that there was something more heroic and more moving than innocence—repentance. I would willingly have knelt and asked his blessing."

"The blessing of a sacrilegious priest!"

"What of him who has never repented?"

The square-cut jaw of Reginald's friend moved in a short, mirthless laugh, and his eyes flashed beneath his heavy brows as he said:

"You are joking, no doubt."

"No, far from it."

"I should never have fancied you such a poet, Reginald. And what did you do? Did you kneel to this priest?"

"No, but we said a prayer together."

"What was this prayer? I am curious to know."

"I do not remember. All this was fifteen months ago, and since then——"

"Well, since then?"

"My views have altered greatly."

Thomas Winne was silent for a long time. He was grieved and shocked, but the friendship between the two young men was being strengthened by their very disagreement. Winne sought for a formula in which to sum up his thoughts and had difficulty in finding one. At last he held out his hand and said: "These are the results of travel and change of environment. You will become your old self again here. All this will pass. How long is it before you go back?"

"Five months at least. I may even get a longer leave."

Winne reflected that five months at home might, indeed, accomplish much. He need not force himself into the secret depths of another's will and conscience. He merely added:

"For my part, I hate all this priestly business!"

Then the friends walked slowly back towards Westgate and parted on entering the town, with the heartiest grasp of the hand they had exchanged for years.

Night was now coming on, but the clouds over the sea still held a lingering glow. It may have been the waves, stirred by a fresh breeze, which flung back so many shimmering rays upon the night sky. Meanwhile Marie Limerel had reached

home, or, rather, the modest story-and-a-half villa on Westgate Bay Avenue, with its tiny garden in front and strip of lawn in the rear, which her mother had rented for the season. She ran quickly up the stairs to their little sitting-room, with its wide bay-windows opening on the esplanade, where she found her mother carefully taking down from the closet her dainty white evening gown. The look of motherly solicitude which often cast an anxious shade over Mme. Limerel's brow lighted up on Marie's entrance.

"Good-evening, mamma," she cried, embracing her. "Did you see little Sister at the convent?"

"Yes, dear, and found her well."

"*Pauvre chérie!* I have deserted her to-day! Ah! I see that you have a letter from Paris," she added hastily, as she caught sight of an envelope lying on the table.

"Yes, Marie, a letter from your uncle, and a somewhat strange letter it is."

"Ah! let us see it," and as Marie spoke she and her mother seated themselves, with the same supple grace of movement, side by side on a couch in the window where, in the half light from a lamp behind them, they appeared like a pair of sisters.

They did not begin to read at once.

"Félicien has passed his examination and taken high rank," remarked Mme. Limerel.

"How delighted I am! He deserves it. He has worked so hard to fit himself for a diplomatic career. And how my uncle has worked to help

him on! How many dinners he has given to his political opponents!"

"Yes, and if it had been the giving of dinners only! If he had not sacrificed his convictions to Félicien's success!"

"What of it, mamma? He has tried to turn himself into another man to serve his son, and it appears that the operation has proved a success. I am not in raptures over the news, but I am well content. Do you not believe me?"

Mme. Limerel let the hand that held the letter drop into her lap and gazed at her daughter for a moment—the brief space a mother requires to read the face of her child—then having found what she sought there and dispelled a passing doubt, she smiled.

The only thing this mother had retained from a happy past was her tender way of smiling at her children. She might still have been pretty had she cared to be so, but she wished to appear young only in the eyes of Marie and Edith. At this moment, however, the likeness was striking between mother and daughter. Both had the same smooth forehead, shaded by masses of dark brown hair, breaking into little ripples like tendrils of gold; both had the same beautiful brows with their perfect arch, the same white skin hardly tinged by the colour that glowed rich and warm beneath. They had the same clever, sensitive lips, Florentine in their long curves, Parisian in the upward tilt at the corners, the same proud glance never devoid of thought, all these signs indicating, under the mere physical resemblance,

equal gifts of mind and heart. The girl, however, was taller and far more robust than her mother, though as they sat nestling close to one another the difference was not apparent.

"Well," said Mme. Limerel at last, "why don't you read your uncle's letter?"

There was no change of expression in the girl's face, no movement stirred her outward tranquillity, but something of her inward radiance was withdrawn, like the tide ebbing back from the sands, as she answered:

"I can easily imagine all he says."

"You expected this letter then?"

"Not actually, but it does not surprise me."

"It does, in fact, concern you," said Mme. Limerel, whereupon Marie began reading rapidly.

M. Victor Limerel first entered into full particulars regarding his own health, that of his wife, and of their son Félicien, before proceeding to announce that the latter had passed his diplomatic examination with honour. Marie's look became more absorbed as she turned the page and read: "Félicien is now a man; he has a profession and all the qualities that insure success. We are therefore disposed, his mother and I, to urge him to marry. He has always declared that he would take this step as soon as he had entered on his profession. The moment has therefore arrived and the question is: Whom shall he marry? You can readily believe that I have given the subject deep consideration, and that our difficulty is simply one of choice.

"I desire, in fact I am determined, that he shall

make an advantageous marriage, and you know me too well to think I would hesitate to define what I mean by this. I mean a wealthy marriage; one which will include those social and family conditions which we are entitled to look for, but, above all—a fortune. I have laboured too hard all my life not to desire a reward at last in the happiness of my son. My wife, I will not deny, would be less exacting, being, as you know, a person of sentiment.

“Why are you not in Paris, my dear Madeleine? I should be so glad to talk over this important matter with you, and appeal to your sound judgment. We do not always agree on minor questions but I feel confident that you would support me in this. You have too much experience of life, too much affection for Félicien, for me to doubt that your counsel in this juncture would be wise and disinterested. You would also have great influence with my wife, and probably with my son as well.

“When are you coming home? I hope you are not proposing to linger for ever on the shores of the English Channel. Reassure me on this point, and give our best remembrances to our nieces, who are, doubtless, as rosy and blooming the one as the other. Six weeks at Westgate! Shall we recognise Marie after such an absence?”

“Well, what do you think, dear?”

“That my uncle is an excellent man of business, and as such feels so superior that he regards other people as simpletons. That is so plain that it stares one in the face.”

"Tell me your whole thought, Marie, so that I may see whether we have drawn the same conclusion."

"I am sure of it. They are attempting to marry Félicien. But my cousin shows no enthusiasm for the very rich bride they have provided for him. He is making objections and my uncle counts on us to overcome them."

"He is in love elsewhere?"

"It is more than possible."

Mme. Limerel laid her hand on Marie's arm, their eyes met and their souls in them.

"Marie, has Félicien ever told you that he loves you?"

"Never plainly. Between cousins one never knows; at least for a long time. They are a genus apart, half-way between brothers and lovers. But he has always treated me with affection and he was very sad when we parted. That is why I think he loves me. His father seems to think so, too."

"Well, dear child, if Félicien were to tell you he loved you, would you marry him?"

The girl rose: she was charming in her blending of youthful gravity and emotion, of feelings half acknowledged and half resisted. The scene suggested by her mother's question rose before her. She heard the words of tenderness, she saw the eager, troubled face of the man who was uttering them. But a sovereign power wrestled with this vision; a certain influence—strong, subtle, noble—spoke other words and penetrated deeper into this young soul.

"There would be a very serious question to settle between us first," she replied. Her mother gave a sign of assent. She must have felt complete confidence in the rectitude and strength of character of this daughter of twenty. She did not seek to question Marie further, but merely said: "As to family ties, do we really constitute one family? We visit each other frequently, and dine together at intervals, but what sympathy is there between us as regards essentials? We manage to avoid open quarrels, but is there not a constant sense of inward irritation on both sides? Are there not heated discussions when we meet, and mutual reproaches? The trouble is, that we are united merely by convention and regard for society. And I believe it is so in most families, and that friendship and congeniality of mind make the true kinship."

At this moment the sound of the Japanese gong, violently struck by their little maid to summon them to dinner, broke off the conversation.

This was the first time that Mme. Limerel and Marie had spent a summer in England during the three years that the younger daughter had been left at school there; and the reasons that had led them to permit themselves such an extravagance were characteristic of the logic and thrift of the old French bourgeoisie in the pursuit of pleasure. Mme. Limerel had been left a widow at twenty-eight, by the sudden death of her husband, a captain of artillery, who had been killed by the explosion of a powder-maga-

zine. In her bereavement she had immediately left the southern city where she was residing with her husband, and returned with her two little daughters to Paris. There her fortune, though not large, had enabled her to live according to her tastes; to entertain her friends modestly, to spend freely for her charities, and to indulge for many years in one luxury which she had now resigned—a carriage of her own. This “equipage,” as it was laughingly styled by M. Victor Limerel, himself an ardent motorist, had long traversed the streets of Paris like the relic of a former age, calling up to the eyes of those who saw it pass the vision of a portly, powdered dowager seated therein, very unlike its actual occupant. It was a coupé from a once fashionable maker, lined with quilted garnet satin and drawn by a dapple-gray mare, maternal of eye, movement, and shape, which trotted solidly along the boulevard, presenting a majestic breadth of chest to the gaze of indifferent Paris.

But within the year Mme. Limerel had decided to give up the “equipage,” to sell the ancient mare, and discharge Joseph, the old coachman, and had announced her intentions to Marie in these words:

“I shall take cabs in future, my dear child, and you and I will travel.”

Accordingly the new régime had been inaugurated by this trip to Westgate-on-Sea, and the hiring of a villa for the season.

The little town of Westgate, having no poor population of its own and frowning upon excur-

sion parties, flourished as happily upon its peace and seclusion as other resorts upon their crowds and noise. There were few passers along the tree-shaded avenue as the two ladies started for their customary evening walk, but the bay-windows of the small villas were all brightly lighted, and the family parties within were plainly visible, enjoying their after-dinner coffee and evening papers.

A sea-breeze was blowing and the air was cool, and sparkling with the tang of brine. Great veils of mist hung vertically over the sea as if suspended from the stars, wrapping earth and sea together in their diaphanous folds. Mme. Limerel and Marie followed the path that skirts the shore, winding up from the beach to Ledge Point, between the smooth lawns of the more luxurious villas. Both women loved this lofty outlook over the mouth of the Thames. At indistinguishable distances in the mist, the gray floor of the bay was streaked with foam from the tracks of countless vessels, and twinkling clusters of lights here and there marked the fleets lying at anchor, men-of-war, fishing boats, or great freighters waiting for the tide to carry their cargoes to the docks of Chatham and London.

Farther still the electric lights on Margate pier illuminated a narrow stretch of sea and revealed a fantastic palace, whose pillared portico and domes of fire seemed to be floating on the water.

Mme. Limerel was in the habit of thinking aloud when alone with Marie, the sympathy which united them leaving to each perfect free-

dom of opinion, while their mutual understanding made silence no barrier between them.

"I am growing tired of this English comfort, Marie," she said; "these people care too much about their ease."

"That may be, mamma, but we must remember that we are seeing them in their holiday season. We ought to see them at work before we judge them. Many of the men have earned in daring enterprises what they are spending in luxury. For instance: I went with Dorothy yesterday to call on Mrs. Milney, whose pretty villa with the white chimneys you can see through the trees yonder, and I discovered what was the origin of their wealth."

"Business, of course."

"Yes, but a business carried on in Honolulu. Their salon is hung with lovely water-colour sketches of the scenes amidst which their fortune was made. Old Samuel Milney, whom we see every afternoon setting out for the golf-links with his groom, is spending in sport the remnants of a physical vigour which has resisted thirty years of plantation life in Oceanica. Two of his brothers are out there now, and his nephew is going soon to join them. Yes, they have a right to feast as they shot their own game and often at great hazard to themselves."

"You love them, child, you might as well confess it."

"I understand them, or at least I am beginning to do so, which is not quite the same thing, mamma."

"You certainly understand them far better than I do."

"That is because you do not play tennis, mamma; and you decline teas, while I go wherever I am invited, and am growing quite used to this social freedom."

"And how do they really strike you, these English people?"

"As very like ourselves, mamma."

"No paradoxes, dear. Every book we read tells us the contrary. Like us, indeed!"

"Not in their habits, of course, but in themselves, the men especially. I assure you I have already encountered several Normans among them, which is, perhaps, not surprising, but also more Gascons than you would think possible, a few dull Auvergnats, not so many Parisians, certainly, but one or two. Indeed, mamma, an Englishman who has travelled is often one of the finest types of men."

"Ah, yes, Marie, but how French you appear to me when I see you in the midst of them!"

"I feel so, too——"

"But you do not feel as I do, I am sure. At this very moment I am pining for our Avenue d'Antin apartment, and the thought of hearing the Montrouge tram-car pass once more seems to me like a bright dream."

"Your dream will be realised before long, dearest, we are going back so soon. For my part, I shall miss all this a little. Look out yonder now!"

They had reached the end of the ledge where the path turned to descend. Beyond them

stretched the curving lines of Westgate and the adjoining beaches festooned along the western coast with their chalk cliffs palely outlined against the starlit sky. The incoming tide filled the night with its murmur, and swayed the grasses along the cliff's edge.

Mme. Limerel raised her arm and pointed out the circle of costly villas fringing the shore.

"The most interesting thing in the world," she said, "is the human soul. How many souls have you discovered during the six weeks you have been playing and talking with these idle Englishmen and women?"

"I have divined a few."

"That is something. Who are they?"

"There is little Dorothy for one. Her inner nature is as clear as a fountain."

"Who besides?"

"Reginald Breynolds."

"What? That well-bred cowboy! He was wonderful in the tournament to-day, you tell me. But you believe that he has a soul? You are sure of it?"

"Yes; a troubled soul, mamma."

"He has confided in you, then, Mademoiselle?"

A light laugh answered her first, then the truthful lips resumed their serious curve.

"He would have to be unhappy indeed to confide in a woman. No, we have exchanged nothing but tennis balls. But I have heard from Dorothy that he and his father do not agree, at least there have been heated discussions between them."

"And do you know the cause?"

"Religion, mamma."

"It is always so, Marie; the longer you live the more convinced you will be that the bitterest dissensions are not over money and material things, but involve souls and consciences. I often say to myself that there has never been a time so theological as ours, so stirred to its depths by opposing spiritual forces. Where is there a family, whether of believers or sceptics, that lives in perfect peace?"

"There is ours, dear, you and I and Edith."

"Poor darling! She must be asleep at this hour."

"Not yet, see! The light in her window is still burning."

They had now left the shore road behind them and were returning by a path that crossed the fields. In the distance before them rose the roofs and turrets of the convent "Des Oiseaux," the home of France in exile.

"That is another cause for regret at leaving Westgate," pursued Marie, "that we must leave Edith behind. The child grows more winning every day."

"Does she not? And she is growing more at home here, too, and appreciates the sacrifice we are making in order to keep her in this pure air where she is gaining strength in body and mind—our little Edith, so tall and slim and fair."

"While I am so tall and slim and brown."

"She is like her father."

"See! Her lamp is out at last. Edith is asleep beneath her white curtains. Sister Noémie has

just glided by in her felt shoes like a soft shadow, and put out the light."

The pale gleam from the second-story windows of the convent had indeed vanished. The thoughts of the mother and elder sister still hovered about the sleeping child as they pursued their quiet way homeward through the starlight, these two who loved each other with an almost equal love, since one was a mother and the other had not yet given her heart.

The following day, in the drowsy stillness of an English Sunday afternoon, an automobile stopped before the door of the villa, and the two French ladies stepped into it, Mme. Limerel, in deference to her late "equipage," insisting that the chauffeur should drive slowly. After crossing a scantily wooded, highly cultivated plateau whose distant slope dipped on either hand to the shores of the bay they descended into a grassy hollow—a sort of channel long ago abandoned by the sea, and now filled with rich pastures divided by wire fences; they next passed a chain of low hills, some densely wooded, others given over to the plough, across whose dry stubble the winds drove the dust in clouds, like spray off the waves. After crossing the last of these hills the limousine turned into a wide avenue shaded by lofty beeches, past a porter's lodge as damp and moss-covered as a forest cave, and rolling smoothly over the sanded driveway in the twilight of the boughs suddenly emerged before a stately dwelling, standing in an open space encircled on all sides by dense

masses of gray-green foliage. The house was a rectangular building with many windows, the red of its brick softened and toned by age and the moisture of the climate, its square towers crowned with crenelated stone battlements, the whole effect mellowed by the misty blue distances of the park which formed its setting.

This was Redhall, and the car having drawn up beneath its portico Mme. Limerel and her daughter alighted, being admitted through a long, glazed gallery resembling a vast conservatory in which family portraits and old china took the place of flowers. Richly emblazoned stained glass filled many of the long windows opening on the park, through which they caught glimpses of a party of golfers in the distance. From the drawing-room, on the other side, came the sound of a piano, strummed by unskilful fingers; as the groom threw open the door this sound suddenly ceased, and Dorothy rose in confusion and flew to embrace her French friend, with cheeks far more flushed than they had been after her exertions in the tennis-field.

"Oh, Marie! Oh, Mme. Limerel! I play so badly," she cried as she greeted them. "I am alone. Every one else is in the park. Lady Breynolds has walked to the lake with the Hunter-Brices, and Sir George is showing Fred Land his kennels."

"How entertaining that must be for Mr. Land!"

"Oh, well! does anything really entertain him, or bore him, either?"

"Perhaps his colleagues do the latter."

"Yes, that is very possible. You can see Robert Hargreave and Donald Hagarty playing golf with the Hunter-Brice girls, and here am I. Shall we go to meet the walking party?" and so speaking she led the way through one of the long windows, past the north front of Redhall and along the high hedge which bordered the flower gardens. Then their three figures were half lost in the wide glades of the giant chestnut grove whose trees were contemporaneous with the castle and had been planted, originally, so far apart that their branches had spread for two centuries before meeting overhead. Last year's dry leaves, sifted by the winter winds, lay piled in pale heaps upon the mossy turf beneath their feet. After a quarter of an hour's walk they overtook Lady Breynolds, who had brought her guests to see her rhododendrons.

From the bank on which they stood she was pointing out the small oval lake from whose margin the dense foliage rose in terraces of unbroken verdure, excluding all other vegetation and enclosing the dull green water of the pool with its glittering leaves and intertwined roots, amid which the foxes found a covert. Not a bud showed its purple hues as yet, though in other seasons, by the end of May, these violet slopes reflected in the water and framed by the forest were like a vision of Eden.

"I am sure that India has no sight so marvellous as this," Mr. Hunter-Brice was saying. He was an athletic personage, reduced by a touch of

gout to this moderate form of exercise, and dragging one leg slightly as he walked. "I am afraid, however, that our friend Reginald doesn't appreciate their beauty; he has been quite dumb all day."

"Oh, he has his days," replied Lady Breynolds hastily; "he is usually devoted to this corner of the park."

But as she spoke her face betrayed some inward disquietude. Accustomed as she was to self-control, she had not quite succeeded in mastering her emotions, and while her voice was submissive to her will, her eyes expressed a secret pain.

Happily at this moment Dorothy's voice, clear as the note of a skylark, caused Lady Breynolds to turn her head and, catching sight of Mme. Limerel and Marie, she recovered control of her nerves and greeted them with her usual gracious courtesy.

"We shall have time to make a tour of the park before dinner," she said, "if Mme. Limerel does not mind so long a walk. I will show you the Highland cattle and my herd of antelopes."

Dorothy passed her arm through Marie's and pointing out Reginald's figure pacing alone on the shore of the lake, in the midst of the rhododendron thicket, she said aloud:

"I hope you may be luckier than I, Marie. I have not succeeded in making his lordship smile once this morning," and in a lower tone she added: "There is certainly something strange going on in this house. Reginald seems very

unhappy, and he does not consider me a sufficiently serious person to confide his woes to. Good-evening, Hamlet," she cried as he approached them. "I am bringing you a beautiful stranger who is worthy of sharing the sorrows of the prince of Denmark."

Reginald shook hands heartily with the two girls, and offered Dorothy a branch of rhododendron bearing the first half-opened bud of the season, like a tiny pine-cone shot with flame colour. Mrs. Hunter-Brice, who was the mother of two unmarried girls, turned to watch this little scene from the comedy of youth, suspecting a romance beneath it, but Dorothy ran ahead to join the others. Reginald lingered behind with Marie.

"I am glad of a chance to talk with you," he said. Marie made no reply and they strolled slowly along the avenue, while Lady Breynolds and her companions were soon lost to sight. The girl looked back over the sheet of water behind them, dimpled with light breezes and reflecting the forest in its depths. Reginald, walking beside her, had not a glance for his companion; his eyes seemed to be pursuing some far-off melancholy dream.

Marie could not divine what trouble he was about to confide to her, but her innate gift of sympathy inclined her to respond fully to this appeal, whatever it might be.

Finally Reginald, folding his arms with a gesture habitual with him when engaged in earnest talk or discussion, began:

"Winne did not come to-day."

This clearly implied and Marie so understood it: If Thomas Winne had been here to-day he would have been the recipient of my confidence, but since he is not at hand, I turn to you.

Without awaiting any further explanation she answered: "He is indeed your best friend."

"Yes," he acquiesced absently; then pursuing his own train of thought he resumed:

"Something serious happened here this morning."

"What was it?" the girl asked.

"I refused to attend church with my father and mother."

Marie raised her eyes to her companion. As he spoke every feature of his manly face, so calm and regular in repose, seemed to contract and harden, while he kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Excuse me, but I do not understand why that is such a serious matter. We feel obliged, we Catholics, to attend church every Sunday, but you are not under the same obligation."

"No, but my father insisted and I refused."

"And what followed?"

"We have been at odds for some time already. He is arbitrary by nature, and he has the right to be so. I am not accusing him, you understand."

He walked on a few steps in silence, then resumed:

"This misunderstanding and lack of sympathy between us has become intensified of late. The moment is approaching when I must make up my mind to yield to him completely, or to break free."

"You fear that he will reopen the subject?"

"Not in the same way. He never repeats himself, but I fear that this very evening, being Sunday, will bring matters to a crisis."

"But what can I do to help you?"

Reginald replied, with a shade of annoyance in his tone and with his face still turned away from her.

"I am not given to asking advice, I assure you. I like to act for myself, on my own responsibility. But the problem that confronts me now is new to me, and I feel that your advice might be of service."

Marie rejected the idea with a slight wave of the hand as she said:

"Why do you not ask counsel from your mother?"

"She would not understand."

"Or from some old friend—Miss Violet Hunter-Brice, for instance, or Dorothy, whom you have known from childhood."

"No, I have chosen you because I am sure you have an enlightened conscience."

He said this with a low laugh which did not relax the drawn expression of his face, although it slightly softened the harsh inflections which his voice had assumed. Marie smiled slightly, but the smile did not linger. "Well," she said, "you may tell me."

But such was Reginald's reluctance at seeking advice, especially from a woman, that he continued to walk on in silence until they reached a bench beneath the trees at a point where

four woodland paths met. Here he motioned Marie to be seated and took his place beside her.

The woods were lonely and deserted at this hour, and wrapped in a soft mist—that mist which is never far distant in the English landscape—but in front of them the arch of foliage opened and revealed the sunlit meadows beyond.

Reginald leaned forward, with his hands upon his knees and his head lower than the girl's who sat erect and silent, awaiting his words and praying inwardly that she might make no mistake.

“Well, this is how it all came about,” he began. “I was brought up here between my father on the one side, very stern as it becomes a man to be, but over stern perhaps for a father—pardon me for saying this; it is necessary in order that you may understand—on the other hand, my mother very tender always, but absorbed in her duties as mistress of a great place which she managed alone, with old-fashioned servants whose outward deference often hides careless indifference to their duties, and farmers who are mere hired agents, with none of that loyalty and attachment to the soil which you in France doubtless imagine to be characteristic of our great feudal estates. My brother was much younger than I, having been born about the time I left Redhall for Eton. So I was brought up in this corner of old England and on my father's Lancashire estate, much like one of those eighteenth century feudal lords who divided their time between field sports and psalm-singing. In matters of religion I was trained to

exact attendance on the services of our church, and a vigorous intolerance—if not of every other form of belief—at least of Catholicism. My parents allowed me to be brought up just as they had been, and among my earliest reading books were “Fox’s Book of Martyrs,” and “The Story of Liberty.” Do you know those two books?”

“By name only.”

“Well, both represent the Catholics as blood-thirsty persecutors and barbarians, and my father never pronounced the word without scorn, or spoke of Mary Tudor otherwise than as ‘Bloody Mary.’ So that, while still very young, I burned with righteous zeal against them, and wondered how my mother could tolerate an Irish maid of that faith beneath her roof. Forgive me for mentioning my childish notions. I have been completely cured of these unjust prejudices against Catholicism. My father, however, stands where he has always stood.”

“And Lady Breynolds?”

“My mother also, but her nature is different. My change of opinions has caused her great suffering I do not doubt, but she has always defended me to my father. She faces the world with a smile, but with my troubles always weighing on her heart. At this very moment I can fancy her pointing out her pet deer and saying, ‘Look! we got our first pair from Lord Llandover, seventeen years ago’; while in her heart she is saying, ‘Reginald in opposition to his father, to the whole past of our race! How can I bear it?’ She suffers, I know. She would not understand though

she would try to forgive me. I escaped from her influence very young, at thirteen, when it was decided that I should go to Eton. I had resolved before that to be a soldier, and when I said, 'I want to enter the army; I want to fight and to cross Africa like Stanley,' my father approved and my mother tried to be as proud as he was that I had chosen that career, but she found it hard."

"I can understand how she felt."

"You see, then, how it was. I had the most high-minded and tenderest of mothers, but we were separated too early for any close intimacy between us on questions of conscience, even if it might ever have existed. Everything else we have had in common; the tie between us has been of the closest; it has been her pride and, at times, her joy. The inward struggle of which I am about to tell you has been until lately my own secret."

Marie looking across the sunlit meadow saw the little group they had recently left returning to the castle, and involuntarily stretched out her hand towards them as if to say, "Why are you not here, you to whom this troubled soul rightly belongs?" Then her arm fell slowly to her side and she did not speak.

"When I was at Eton," Reginald went on, "and later at the military school at Sandhurst, I had hours of ardent faith. The young so naturally aspire to God. I listened to sermons by the best preachers of our Church. I found them often eloquent and elevated in thought, but I was conscious that the life of Christ on

earth was not brought near to me; that nothing I heard seemed to make it close and imitable. Morally I strove to follow those principles which I had heard preached and which, it is but just to say, I had seen practised, the chief of them being: 'Seek the truth, follow the truth, cleave to the truth.' These lofty precepts inspired my will, but I felt them to be too vague and abstract and I asked myself: Where is truth, since my code of action is not always the same as that of others? How decide, since it receives its sanction merely from my own authority, and I may be following a blind guide? My heart suffered as well as my reason, for the Divine example seemed rather an abstraction, as I told you, than a living friend."

"Your ideal seems to me a noble one."

"Do not judge too hastily or you may be disappointed. I entered a Catholic church for the first time at Farnborough, near Sandhurst, and first saw Catholic sisters at the Italian hospital in Queen Square—those with the great white caps you know."

"The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent."

"Yes, and the sight touched me most of all, because purity and charity seemed natural to them. They were not striving to be pure in heart but simply were so, nor to be devoted to the poor and suffering, for they were so naturally, and with their whole being. The music of your Church, too, and the discipline which I saw in everything and which I knew to be the same the world over, gave me the impression of a very

great and powerful organisation of which I was not a part.

"At the same time, during the Sandhurst vacations, I read many controversial works, especially those undertaking to refute the errors of Rome. But they did not free me from these torturing doubts, as unrelenting as the fevers of the jungle. Finally I went out to join my regiment in India—my white regiment, you understand—and a year later I obtained my transfer to a native regiment, which had always been my desire. Out there I had many days of vigorous action without time for thought, but these were followed by long periods of inaction given over to haunting memories and deep musings. You cannot imagine these tormenting mental preoccupations, you who have always lived in the quietude of faith."

"The peace, yes, but not the quietude. That does not belong to our day."

"I mean that you have never felt called upon seriously to defend the ideas which constitute your belief. A young girl—especially among you—receives her faith ready-made and does not dream of changing it."

"You are mistaken there. If she changes her faith less often than a man, it is because she knows it more thoroughly and can defend it better."

"Then you *can* understand the state of a soul which sees the faith it has inherited wavering. For months out there in the mountains or the jungle, with fierce native tribes about us, I strug-

gled to come to some settled conviction on that question, so long debated between your Church and ours, of the Real Presence in the sacrament. That seems to me to constitute the essence of religion. Certain of the faithful among us believe it, but it is not authoritatively taught by our Church, and yet I find in St. John: 'Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life'; and in St. Matthew: 'Take, eat, this is my body.' Why suppress these texts? How explain them otherwise than by the Real Presence? During those solitary months I was brought face to face with the dilemma which constantly pressed upon my mind: If Catholicism be false what truth is there in the other Christian Churches? Is Christianity itself an illusion cherished by thousands of human beings? For Catholicism appeared to me not as the object of my own faith, still so shattered and wavering, but as the type of Christianity at its highest degree of energy, in its closest union with the divine."

"And during all this time were you praying for help?" asked Marie.

"Yes, but I have not your faith. God has not answered me. I have destroyed the belief I once held and have not yet attained the other. It has become impossible to me to consider myself as belonging to the religious communion in which I was brought up, and at the same time when I turn towards what I have called the highest type of Christianity, the Roman faith, all the imagery, all the suspicions, all the imprecations in which I

have been nursed rise up once more and revive within me. I ask your pardon for saying this, but you must hear it to understand my state of mind. I think of Babylon, of the Scarlet Woman; I recall the apostrophe of George Borrow in 'The Bible in Spain,' where he says: 'Pope of Rome, I believe you to be as malicious as ever, but you are sadly deficient in power. You have become paralytic, Batushca, and your club has degenerated to a crutch.'

"Then I am aghast at the thought that men have endured such sufferings, waged such wars, defied hatred, endured humiliation, have loved, obeyed, lifted their eyes to heaven, all for a magnificent but vain illusion! Forgive my words.'

The serious lips which had already moved silently now replied simply:

"I will pray for you."

He was not thinking of her, but of himself. She merely replaced for him his absent friend. The fact of her being a woman, her youth and charm signified nothing to this man tormented and driven by higher and more pressing concerns, and did nothing towards modifying his stern logic or softening its bitter expression. Nevertheless some deep feeling now stirred within him as Marie Limerel spoke and he answered, with his eyes still full of trouble:

"I am grateful to you, very grateful. And now that you know that I no longer belong to the Church of my father, nor, indeed, to any Church, advise me. Suppose that this evening, or to-morrow, my father requests me to affirm

by a word or a sign my adherence to that Church, what must I do? Where does loyalty and truth to my own soul lie?"

He waited, drawing back a little in order to look at the thoughtful profile of this young girl who was about to judge him, and whose lips were to pronounce sentence. They parted and she spoke.

"Why not refuse, since your conscience dictated that course this morning?"

"That would mean a final rupture with my father. He will not understand or pardon my insubordination."

"Your liberty of conscience in fact."

"Yes, my liberty. But in his eyes it will appear mere blindness and ingratitude. And I shall not even have the compensation of having sacrificed my place in my father's affections for a truth of which I am absolutely convinced. I shall be merely one who says: 'I do not see truth where it exists for you, nor do I see it clearly elsewhere.' Is it not hard to take such an attitude when dictated by no positive conviction?"

"You are obliged, above all, to be true."

"You are right."

"In your place I should do as I have said."

Reginald was silent for a moment, then spoke firmly and deliberately: "I will do it." He remained for a while with his eyes fixed on the ground; then his features relaxed in obedience to a will which had resumed its power, and as he rose his voice rang out with its wonted cheerfulness: "We shall be late for tea and I shall have to apologise for detaining you. Let us hasten back.

The Misses Hunter-Brice have been wanting so much to know you, they will be furious with me, and one of them seems like a very vindictive person. Miss Violet is a sort of witch."

"Really!"

"Yes, a witch wrapped in clouds of gossamer—you will see."

And so the two young people hurried back along the avenue under its roof of spreading oak branches, trying to resume their every-day talk, and to forget the intimate and serious words that had just passed between them, but the deeply moving subject they had discussed could not be so lightly thrown aside. They walked rapidly, talking with forced enthusiasm of the sunset, trying to laugh and exchange light words which seemed to say, "We are strangers again," and yet they could not be quite the same to each other as before.

No one expressed the least surprise at their prolonged absence. The golf players having now returned, some introductions took place, but tea was over and the little tables laden with buttered toast and muffins, tea-cakes, chocolate, madeira, and sherry were set back against the wall. The talk was interrupted by the arrival of the master of the house with Mr. F. Land, and one of the ladies addressing the latter asked:

"Did Sir George maintain his favourite paradox, that Kent is a good fox-hunting county?"

"No, I did not," asserted the baronet. "I am growing old and reforming."

"I am sure at least that you bragged of your

dogs as the best pack in Kent or Sussex, superior even to the Tickham or Lord Lecanfield's. Now, didn't you, Sir George? And have you convinced your friend?"

"Convinced him! A man who understands everything and cares for nothing, not I."

"Nothing but books, you mean."

"Yes, his own, perhaps," and the old squire, whose voice was hoarse with British fogs and fox-hunting, not to speak of British pipes and ale, burst into a resounding laugh.

The distinguished critic, familiarly known among his intimates as Fred Land, replied genially:

"Not even those. I no longer look into my own books for fear of finding them unreadable. A thought only lasts a moment and is buried beneath the next thought, one tomb upon another. I am much prouder, I assure you, of having given Lady Breynolds a recipe for tea-cake than of writing any book."

Whatever words the great critic uttered were belied by a lurking expression in the corner of his eyes, around his lips, or in the lines of his forehead—a reserve, a contradiction, some hint of easy indifference or sarcasm, giving the impression of a deep and but partially understood power. This was suggested, also, by the carriage of his head, the imperious arch of the brows, the prominent nose, the loose masses of hair tossed back from his forehead like a mane. His smooth-shaven, leonine countenance was so dominating, so vital with intelligence that one scarcely noticed that the

body supporting it was below the medium height and somewhat obese and heavy with age. His hands, however, were still shapely and delicate, and adorned with rings of great price. This was the companion with whom his host was making the circuit of the hall, stopping to greet each of the guests in turn. The contrast they presented was striking, for Sir George, although of a caustic and practical mind, gave the impression of extreme physical, rather than intellectual, vigour.

He was a man for whom the duties of hospitality had the importance of an hereditary function, a prerogative of the aristocracy, of which he acquitted himself with the ease due to long habit, but not without a secret longing for the more congenial freedom of his out-of-door life.

His appearance betrayed no symptoms of that gradual slackening of the energies in speech and gesture which is the forerunner of old age. He was clad in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers of a rough, greenish cloth which he called his armour, and shod with hob-nailed shoes, while his sturdy calves were clothed in gaiters of chamois leather.

He stopped for a moment beside Reginald, who was standing by himself in a corner of the drawing-room, and measuring his son's lofty stature with a glance of secret pride he said:

"What have you been doing all the afternoon? I haven't seen you since morning."

"I have been for a walk with Mlle. Limerel."

"You couldn't do better," and with that he resumed his circuit of the room, pausing to address the Hunter-Brice girls with somewhat formal

and studied pleasantries. These young ladies were engaged in imparting their views upon the prospects of the Labor party to Fred Land, who listened with an air of patient resignation.

Sir George proceeded on his way, stopping to joke more freely with his old crony, the tall and attenuated Richard Hargreave, a professor of Tamil, who spoke his own language badly and with a decided stammer. An animated discussion was going on between the liberal M. P. Donald Hagarty and the aged Hunter-Brice, a Tory, a protectionist, and the head of several railroad corporations, and Sir George threw himself into the contest with a zest which revealed the born fighter, argumentative and stubborn. His twenty years' seniority over Lady Breynolds showed plainly enough in the thin-skinned, florid countenance where the blue veins stood out prominently on forehead and temples, and a certain surly doggedness lurked in the lines around the mouth and thin set lips, and where the small, bead-like blue eyes twinkled beneath bristling shaggy eyebrows. His friends said of him: "When Sir George dies, England will lose the most British of her sons." He was, in fact, the typical John Bull, a child of old England, firmly attached to old customs, to his rank, his Church, and all that, in his eyes, formed an essential part of the British Constitution. He rejected all novelties which conflicted with the existing scheme of things. He was faithful to his friendships as also to his enmities. No one beneath his roof ever dreamed of disputing his orders, or even

asking for an explanation of them. He could forgive negligence, but never lack of discipline or what he chose to call insubordination. His faith in his country was boundless and touching. He read his *Times* daily in order to become more thoroughly imbued with a sense of the superiority of England and the progress of the empire, and stoutly refused to recognise any defects in his party or his nation. If by chance he discerned a slight crack in the edifice, he proceeded to stop it up with an aphorism such as, "Have no fear, rely upon the sound common sense of the English people." He had never been seen to shed a tear. In times of bereavement or anxiety, such as the loss of his mother who had died at Redhall, or once during an alarming illness of Lady Breynolds, Sir George had shut himself up in his own rooms and spoken to no one, but when he emerged he was seen to have altered and grown old, showing the deep hold which mental suffering had upon his stern and reticent nature.

Evening was now drawing on. Through the long windows the distant hills and the fringe of forest could be seen glowing in the amber light of the sinking sun. Lady Breynolds rose, as a signal to her guests that they might seek their rooms for a little repose before dressing for dinner. Half after eight saw them again traversing the brilliantly lighted long gallery and re-entering the drawing-room, the men in dress suits, the ladies in low evening gowns not all designed perhaps after the latest Parisian fashion.

Miss Violet Hunter-Brice, for example, had

seen fit to swathe herself in billowy scarfs of sea-green gauze, which cast strange reflections on her neck and shoulders and her long, pale face, giving her a studied resemblance to the fay Melusine, or the fabled enchantress of some old romance.

Her mother, on the other hand, was wearing voluminous puffed sleeves of some remotely ancient fashion; but in spite of these minor eccentricities of style the general effect of the toilettes, coiffures, and jewels was one of individuality, combined with a certain traditional elegance. The men wore evening clothes with the same easy air as their sporting suits, their low shoes permitting a display of silken socks of varied hues, of which some of them appeared not a little vain.

Even the great Fred Land had not disdained to apply his intellect to the frivolities of dress. He appeared to have refreshed himself by a nap, and his fine face, never devoid of thought, had assumed an added expression of malice, irony, and wilful paradox.

Marie found herself seated at dinner between a shy youth who had nothing to say, and the Oriental scholar, Hargreave, who was evidently fascinated by the sea-green draperies of Miss Violet Hunter-Brice on his other side; she therefore was at liberty to observe those about her, and to let her thoughts wander back to the confidences she had received from the son of the house that afternoon. Since their return from the walk he had not addressed a word to her nor appeared conscious of her presence. She could see him now at the farther end of the table chatting with

Dorothy, his usual quiet gravity unclouded by any shade of uneasiness, and with that apparent impassibility of demeanour which results from the English training, and is regarded as merely the proper evidence of self-control. He bent over his little neighbour with something of the air of one of the Great Powers condescending to a smaller principality, listening to its appeals for aid, and vouchsafing it some small but precious scraps of stored-up wisdom. Then suddenly a gleam of youth lighted up his face, the firm-set lips relaxed and grew dreamy, the calm blue eyes opened wider, while varying shades of expression, smiling, impatient, challenging, lent animation to his clear-cut features. Reginald's was indeed one of the three faces at table which evinced a strongly marked personality, the other two being his father's and Fred Land's.

Sir George, who was doing ample justice to the viands and the excellent wines set before him, occasionally raised his imperious, choleric visage from his plate to address some bantering speech to each guest in turn, in a somewhat similar tone to that with which he accosted his huntsmen when riding to hounds.

Fred Land, after remaining silent during the earlier courses, had been entertaining his neighbour, the handsome Mrs. Hunter-Brice, on some subject, doubtless of deep interest to himself, as in fact most subjects were, and was now ready, as was evident from the eager glances he cast about him, to seize or create an opportunity for addressing the whole table.

He was an excellent type of the imperialist temperament, while Sir George might be described, like the commercial companies of his native land, as strictly "limited," for while his nature was perhaps as ardent as the other man's, it was far narrower and more insular in all its manifestations.

"Doubtless, Lady Breynolds," Hargreave was saying, "Dimitri Keiromenos's book on contemporary Greek writers is a painstaking work."

"The epithet is poor but just," remarked Fred Land.

"Is it in English?" inquired Sir George.

"No; it is not translated yet."

"Then I shall postpone *not* reading it until it is. Bless me, what a waste of time! The world would get on just as well if no such books existed."

"Plato made the same observation in regard to the poets," replied Mr. Land, "and we may cheerfully echo it concerning Keiromenos's book. There are countries too small to support a literature of their own, and modern Greece is one of them. But as to literary art in general, my dear Sir George, it is the leading power in a state, more important than its navy or its commerce. No country is really great which has not received its patent of nobility from literature. There are peers among nations, Sir George, and baronets and gentlemen, just as there are hod-carriers and cockneys."

"You believe in the power of the literary class, then?"

"If I did not I should certainly not belong to it."

"Well answered! but if that is the case, why are

you always attacking it? You have not spared one of our leading novelists."

"That is because I love them, Sir George. I warn them, I give them good advice gratuitously. I am the whipper-in of their corporation. Besides I haven't attacked them *all*. You exaggerate my merits."

Several women's voices were raised in protest, and Lady Breynolds laughingly named a couple of famous authors whom Land had handled mercilessly, while Mrs. Hunter-Brice and Dorothy added two or three more names, to the intense satisfaction of the critic whom nothing gratified so much as evidences of his unpopularity. He repeated the names of his victims slowly, rolling them on his tongue as if he were tasting a delicious morsel.

"It may be so," he observed. "I admit that several of the writers you mention may have fared rather badly at my hands."

"What is it you reproach them with?" asked Hargreave. "More than one of them has style, an easy, flowing style."

"Yes, they write as they talk. That is what you mean, is it not? A very good way, my dear fellow, if one happens to talk well."

Whereupon the critic poured forth an amusing diatribe on modern English prose, calling it the language of the turf and the counting-room, a speech which has ceased to ring with the resonance of verse. Then suddenly breaking off in the midst of a sentence and striking a graver key: "You ask me what I reproach these writers with?

I will tell you. With refusing to open their eyes to the perils that threaten us."

"What perils?" queried the baronet.

At that moment the servants were setting out a service of rare old porcelain brought from China by some ancestor of Sir George's, one of the treasures of Redhall.

"The spirit of sedition which is infecting us, Sir George."

The baronet gave a dry laugh as he turned his twinkling blue eyes on the speaker.

"So it has been ever since Adam was in the garden, my friend. You may make yourself easy on that score; we are not like our neighbours, rash and ill-balanced—I beg your pardon, Madame. I have always put my faith in the sound good sense of the English people, and I have never been disappointed. What new peril have you discovered? The agitation of the masses? It has always been the same, more or less. What do you find that is new?"

"It is no longer an agitation for mere material betterment," said Hargreave.

"It has become political," added Fred Land.

"And religious," said another voice.

All eyes were turned towards Reginald Brey-nolds, who spoke with no thought of uttering paradoxes or making agreeable conversation, but as if on the defensive, impassive as usual, with head thrown back and eyes seeking a contradiction, much as he looked for a ball on the rebound on the tennis-court, with the same tension of mind and forward poise of the body.

Sir George frowned impatiently.

"What nonsense you are talking, Reginald," he said. "The workingmen are not stirred up about creeds. The shilling takes the place of honour in all this business. I don't see your point."

"I am not speaking of popular demonstrations of a social or political nature. For those I feel a natural sympathy."

"Natural, you say! I don't feel it. If it were natural I should feel it, too."

"If you would only allow him to explain himself," murmured Lady Breynolds.

"There is something besides," pursued her son in a vibrating voice. "A spirit of disorder and evil which exists in every country—among us, too. I see it plainly. It is a conspiracy against the soul, seeking to drag it down—a rage against all that raises mankind, what I call the essential revolution. I sometimes think that if England is ever attacked by the masses, it will be because of the eucharist which has been seen lifted upon her hills."

"Poet," broke in Fred Land. "You are a genuine poet, Reginald, and poetry carries us far."

"Hitherto our country has been left to its spiritual torpor," he pursued, "but she is now turning towards the divine, and hence this war against the new spirit which is filling her. That is my belief."

"He is not a poet, my dear fellow," said Sir George aside to Fred Land; "he is a madman."

Tell me this, Reginald, is it papistry which you call divine?"

"I cannot say out of what truths the supreme truth is made, I do not know by what name it is called. But for me the religious question takes the lead of all others in the life of the people as well as of the individual. I believe that the spirit of Christ has never been so present in the world as now. Though his name is less often pronounced, it is implied in every great movement whether in love or hate. I believe that this new spiritual drama will end in a resurrection."

The courage of the young man who spoke out of the depths of his heart was so simple that all listened gravely, more or less moved. Marie Limerel wished that his face were turned towards her so that he might read her sympathy in her eyes, but having made his answer, he now quietly resumed his talk with Dorothy.

Fred Land, who had little taste for religious discussions, was also bending once more over the lady beside him. Sir George merely remarked: "He would make an excellent parson, wouldn't he?" But the tone in which he said it showed that his annoyance was keen and his resentment deep.

A general effort on the part of the guests was powerless to restore the commonplace tone of the previous conversation. Sir George was in greater haste than usual to catch Lady Breynolds's eye, whereupon host and hostess rose simultaneously, and the ladies left the dining-room, escorted to the door by the baronet, while the men all stood,

watching the softly tinted floating draperies gather like a cloud in the doorway and disappear.

As Sir George resumed his seat, the butler brought a fresh bottle of port and a silver case in which lay piled, in separate compartments, Turkish, Egyptian, and Russian cigarettes.

Their glasses refilled, the men drew closer around Sir George, their voices assuming an easier tone, expressive of a slight relief from constraint which they would have been loath to acknowledge. Fred Land, apprehensive as to the temper of his host, and wishing to ward off any chance of a quarrel between father and son, hastened to rally Robert Hargreave on the subject of certain aspersions which the newspapers had lately cast upon the state of morals in the great universities. The scholar took up the cudgels in behalf of these institutions, supported by Hunter-Brice, who had been, in his day, a brilliant student at Eton and Oxford.

Reginald sat like one pursuing his own train of thought, who catches the sound but not the sense of the talk around him. Sir George, sitting very erect, with his eyes obstinately bent upon the goblet before him, glowing with the tawny hue of the wine and reflecting the gleam of the candles, seemed, contrary to his custom, to be sunk in reflection. Suddenly Reginald, who was watching him intently, saw him raise his glass with a rapid movement to the level of his eyes, and on seeing the gesture turned pale. "To-day is Sunday," said Sir George, "and in accordance with the old English custom among friends, I offer

two toasts." He paused a moment, holding his glass with a steady hand, then added: "Gentlemen, the king."

Every glass was raised in response, forming a crown held aloft by the hands of seven loyal Englishmen; then the glasses being emptied, at a sign from their master the servants refilled them.

With a more deliberate gesture Sir George raised his again and said with greater emphasis, "And now the Church." This time every glass save one was raised in honour of the Church of England, and Sir George, without putting his to his lips, continued to hold it high and to gaze straight before him, though the whole current of his blood swayed to his right hand where sat the one whose glass was still untouched.

Several of the men who had begun to drink paused, only old Hunter-Brice quaffed his port to the dregs and murmured "Excellent," but in so low a tone that the word dropped unnoticed in the silence.

Every movement ceased; Sir George's ruddy face had turned livid, the tawny liquid in his wine-glass trembled and two drops fell. Then he lowered his arm, set the glass back on the table, and without bending his head closed his eyes.

Every one glanced stealthily or boldly at Reginald Breynolds, whose youthful countenance was rendered impassible by his will, and whose hand was still stretched out with fingers apart as if to grasp the crystal stem of his wine-glass. The baronet, without a glance at him, pushed back his chair violently and exclaimed.

"Let us go."

Then suddenly recovering himself, he seemed to realise that he was neglecting his duties as a host, and passing his hand across his brow he attempted to smile as he added:

"Excuse me, my friends, I was forgetting that you had not smoked."

He struck a match and held it out towards the cigarette of his nearest neighbour. A dead silence followed while the tobacco caught fire, but the friend did not raise the cigarette to his lips, and as the match burnt out the men all rose.

II

OUT of respect for himself and his guests Sir George had controlled his anger, but he could not obliterate all traces of those cruel moments which had strained his nerves beyond endurance, and stirred his pulses to fever heat.

On seeing him enter the drawing-room the ladies waiting there divined that there had been a conflict between father and son, and that neither had yielded; and while pursuing their chat on feminine themes—those airy nothings upon which they could talk without thinking—all were secretly thrilled and agitated at the sight of this old man, evidently wounded to his heart's core. Impatient as they were to learn what had taken place, they took pains to raise their voices and to carry on a still more animated and futile conversation, under cover of which they contrived to interchange whispered comments and to direct furtive glances from time to time at Sir George and at Reginald.

The former immediately on his entrance had seized his friend, Fred Land, by the arm and drawn him into the recess of a window at the farther end of the vast, brilliantly lighted room, and while he remained standing there, with his eyes fixed in a vacant stare, the critic with a

zest which did not appear forced, was pouring into his ear a narrative of youthful exploits in which they had both taken part. "Yes, George," he was saying, "don't you remember that you had told the groom to walk the horses up and down outside while we, a party of hungry and worn-out hunters, poured into the inn?" From time to time the baronet's lips parted as if to say, "Go on, the hour is nearly up," but he gave no other sign of attention. Lady Breynolds continued to perform her duties as hostess in apparent unconsciousness, moving from group to group with her usual quiet dignity and graciousness, as if seeking to prolong for one evening more the tradition of Redhall's happy days.

Reginald, seated at the opposite end of the room, was showing Cuthbert Hagarty the big portfolio of sketches in crayon and water-colours which Sir George had brought home from China and Australia. He had not once approached Marie. His purpose, stimulated by a woman's word, kept the track he had marked out for it; and if he suffered in consequence this was no time to show it. Among the whispered comments exchanged between the guests two recurred like a refrain: "Reginald did all that loyalty required of him," and "Sir George can settle the matter without us."

Mme. Limerel and Marie departed early. Their baggage was brought down and placed on the car which awaited them at the door, the fur robes were wrapped around their knees, and the door closed upon them with a sharp click.

Dorothy, who was watching their departure from the nearest window, turned to Reginald saying: "That is their farewell to Redhall. How sharp and dry it sounds! And yet she was a sympathetic creature, that French girl. Shall you see her again?"

"I think not," replied Reginald.

The car had soon left the park and was whirling along the country road. The weather had changed; a south-west wind was sweeping across the British Isles like a flood-tide without an ebb. Except where the lower currents were broken by hills or dwellings, the tree-tops bent and swayed before it and the foliage rustled in the blast.

Far overhead a great bank of cloud, uniform, dense, and black, covered two-thirds of the sky, while in the east a few pale stars twinkled on the edge of the storm. This cloud which spread over many counties and was laden with the smoke of factory towns, heavy with the dust and débris of human wretchedness, and the miasma arising from crowded streets, would soon float above the North Sea and be lost in the immensity of its icy billows. As Marie watched it, her thoughts were busy with Reginald's confidences and the subsequent stormy scene to which she had heard veiled allusions.

Finally Mme. Limerel spoke: "Your long walk with Reginald Breynolds this afternoon must have given you a clew to the scene which took place after we left the dining-room. It seems to have been an intense and moving one."

"Yes, he told me he feared something of the sort, but I did not understand at the time what he meant."

"I am not asking you to betray his secrets, *chérie*."

"They are indeed not mine, mamma. If they were you should be told all."

After a pause Mme. Limerel added: "He reminds me of the portraits of Cardinal Newman in his youth."

"Really! That strikes me as more just than the comparison you made the other day—do you remember—the cow-boy?" Marie Limerel's head stood out in delicate relief against the gray lining of the limousine as she leaned back, shrouded in her veils and with half-closed eyes. Her mother continued to gaze out at the landscape as they whirled by, at the writhing shrubs which in the uncertain light looked like tethered animals struggling to break loose. To the north and west the lighthouses and harbour beacons, the gleaming line of quays and jetties, formed a great half-circle of light beneath the canopy of cloud sweeping out towards the open sea.

At Redhall the evening had ended early. The other guests were all staying in the house, and shortly after eleven the lights were extinguished in the drawing-room, and the ladies having retired, the men had betaken themselves to the smoking-room, a spacious apartment brightly lighted and lined with books.

The official curfew having sounded they entered quietly.

Some of them had already divested themselves of formal evening dress. Fred Land had merely substituted easy slippers for his patent-leather pumps, but Hunter-Brice had assumed a complete suit of chamois-coloured flannel, and the Honourable Donald Hagarty, M. P., had exchanged his black coat for a velveteen shooting-jacket. The younger men were still in evening dress, and all were smoking, sipping whisky-and-soda, and resuming the easy talk and laughter customary at Redhall.

Sir George, buried in a deep easy-chair beside his old friend Hagarty, was staring into the park and talking, as was his wont, in abrupt, jerky sentences, between the puffs of his cigar, and with long intervals of silence, during which both men listened to the voices of the other smokers who seemed to be all talking at once.

To all appearances, everything was proceeding according to the usual routine of the house, but no one present put any faith in this outward calm, and from time to time anxious glances were directed towards the old lord of Redhall, while murmurs of restrained sympathy encompassed him.

A little past midnight, as Fred Land, Robert Hargreave, and young Cuthbert Hagarty approached the baronet to bid him good-night, he signed to Reginald, who was following them, to remain behind. For some moments he continued his talk with the worthy Hagarty, contesting point by point that liberal M. P.'s views upon the naval programme of the admiralty.

Their cigars had finally gone out and Mr. Hagarty was about to light another when Sir George stopped him, and handing him a gold-ringed Havana, said gravely: "Take that with you, my friend; you can smoke it in your room. I have some business to settle with my son to-night." Recalled to a consciousness of the family drama which he had momentarily forgotten, Hagarty started, and stared at the cigar, twisting it in his fingers, while he asked himself whether he might urge his old friend to show indulgence towards his son and heir. But his natural reserve and dread of interfering in the affairs of others prevailed, and he contented himself with grasping the hand of father and son in turn before he withdrew, leaving them alone. As his footsteps died away along the corridor, Sir George, steadying himself by grasping the arms of his chair, turned slowly round to face Reginald, who, seeing that his father was about to speak, drew back a step or two. The baronet raised his head with a sudden movement and gazed fixedly at his son; then his thin lips parted and in a low tone, as if to show his perfect self-possession, he spoke:

"I cannot remember a sadder day than this."

"Nor I, father," answered Reginald.

"Nor a more disgraceful one."

"There you must permit me to differ from you."

"What you have done is disgraceful. You have refused to pledge the prosperity of the Church, here under my roof, on this land granted us by Queen Elizabeth. Never, do you hear, since toasts have been drunk at Redhall, has such an

affront been offered our house by a stranger as I have endured to-night from my own son, in the presence of my guests. What have you to say? How do you justify yourself for this refusal, following upon that of this morning?"

"You know my respect for you, father——"

"No idle words, if you please. Your reasons, if you have any."

"I have one—the same for both refusals. I have been studying religious questions——"

"That matters nothing to me. You may believe within yourself whatever you like, but in England the Anglican Church is a national institution, and respect for it is a duty we owe the State. An affront to the one is an affront to the other. To deny the Church is to deny one's country."

"There again I must differ from you. The King always—the Church if I can. Allegiance to it is not imposed on one. I am free. I claim the right of private judgment."

"Not at all! Traditions are a law and so is family union. You may separate yourself on one point or another from the Established Church, but to refuse to pay honour to an essentially English institution is a disgrace to an Englishman. One of my race! Do you think I am a man to endure it?"

Reginald shook his head like one who feels powerless to explain his views, so widely divergent were they from his father's. But Sir George insisted.

"Explain yourself, that is all I ask. But you cannot get out of it by mere words."

"I am not attempting to get out of it. I find myself in a position which I have been dreading since this morning. I have displeased you deeply. But I owe it to myself, before all things, to be sincere and to let my actions accord with my thoughts. The whole truth is that I have changed. I am no longer bound to our Church by ties of faith. Do not fear, however, my inveighing against those who remain faithful to her creed—many of them are too dear to me. But to profess a faith I no longer hold, even by a sign—a false sign—to swear an eternal allegiance to which no thought within me corresponds—I can do it no longer!"

Sir George's voice rose to a higher pitch as he retorted: "A papist then!"

"If I were one, father, I should only be reverting to the faith of our fathers before Elizabeth's time."

"They had not been ennobled by their sovereign, Reginald."

"But they were men, and freemen, and they held the Roman faith."

"Not the English."

"Be that as it may. It was the universal faith. Reassure yourself, however, I am not the papist you imagine. It is that which has made this step more difficult and, therefore, more praiseworthy."

"Pshaw!"

"I do not belong to the Roman Church. I am even far, as I believe, from adopting that faith. I am merely separated from our Church and in a state of painful doubt."

"Well, sir, I am about to make it more painful to you."

"I do not know how that can be."

"You will soon see," and as he spoke Sir George raised the mighty fist with which he reined in his Irish hunters, and brought it down upon the table with a crashing blow. "I will not suffer this estate to descend, on my death, to one who insults those from whom I hold it!"

Reginald was silent.

"I must request you, Reginald, to open that bookcase; on the lower right hand shelf you see those volumes of the 'Laws of England,' bound in red morocco?"

"Yes, father."

"Look for the laws of William III. Good! Hand the book to me."

Sir George uncrossed his legs and taking the huge quarto stamped with the coat-of-arms of the Breynolds upon his knees, turned the leaves with a firm hand until he came to the "Fines and Recoveries Act of 1833," chapter 74. He turned his stern old face upon Reginald, all his prodigious vitality concentrated in the small blue eyes. He was about to judge and to pronounce sentence in the name of his house; and without seeking it he wore on his countenance a look of secret irony, combined with the ardent satisfaction of a loyal judge sentencing a political criminal. He was not avenging himself; he was the representative and defender of Old England.

"The wording is explicit," he said. "I have the right, and I shall act upon it, to disinherit you

from my estate of Redhall, which is not entailed, and to leave it to your brother. It is only necessary, you see, to register the decision in the upper courts within six months." And far as he was from being in a jovial mood, the old gentleman chuckled dryly as he added: "It will merely cost me a tax of one shilling per seventy-two words. Well, what do you say to that?"

Reginald, standing impassively before him, replied:

"That you have the power to do as you say."

"And you may as well add," returned Sir George, "that you know me well enough to be sure that I shall do it."

"Yes, father."

"And you may also add that it is perfectly just."

"I have no doubt, sir, that you think it so."

"Not at all! It is just in itself. I will have no changes at Redhall—no timber felled nor boundaries altered nor tenants evicted nor the ancient, common faith abandoned. Why, the very deer would flee the park if it had a papist master! No, no! that shall never be."

"I must assure you once again, father, that I have not become a Roman Catholic."

"And I must assure *you* that you will be one soon. I am not a man to be deceived. I see where you stand. But I will content myself with your formal assurance. Promise me, Reginald, that on the day when you give in your adherence to the Romish Church you will give me notice, wherever I am and wherever you may be."

The young man's eyes sought for any trace of faltering, any gleam of pity or help, in those keen blue eyes which probed, urged, commanded him.

A hard condition, he thought. You threaten a conscience already wavering, and you are reinforced by all the power of nature, of old customs and surroundings. You know how I love this place of which you are so ready to despoil me. But he uttered no word of this.

"If you think it just to require such a pledge, I will give it," was all he said.

"Good! I count upon it then."

These words were pronounced with the harshness of a sentence, and the expression of Sir George's face grew more disdainful as he added:

"It strikes me, Reginald, that a journey might profitably occupy the remainder of your leave."

"That is what I was about to propose," replied the young officer coldly. "I had intended to travel later, I shall now go at once."

"When do you start?"

"To-night, sir."

"Very well. I must request you not to have Vulcan harnessed, as he limped this afternoon. My other horses are at your service." So saying the old man rose, and without one glance or word of farewell, left the room.

Reginald remained standing, following his father's retreating figure until it disappeared, then turned away and passed his hand across his eyes, while every word and act of the day crowded upon his mind. How could one short day have sufficed for all these changes? His life, his future,

his prospects, words so full of meaning this morning, had grown empty now. He could have wept over this utter ruin had not his manhood and a life-long habit of self-restraint checked this momentary weakness.

He approached the window and stared out into the blue distances of the park, which lay bathed in dew and glimmering softly in the moonlight. The path leading to the gardener's cottage stretched clear and white across the lawn like a streak of silver. At the same moment he caught sight of the head gardener himself, the stout, important, thoroughly British William, stepping along this path as noiselessly as possible, all the curves and amplitudes of his sturdy figure emphasised by the moonlight.

He was on his way home from the servants' hall, where he was a frequent and welcome guest, and where it was the custom, whenever there were guests at dinner, to celebrate the occasion by quaffing loyal bumpers of port to the master's health—a custom which Sir George tolerated and paid for, along with many other time-worn abuses.

William was, in consequence, mildly tipsy and swayed slightly on his stout calves as he hastened towards his pretty, thatched cottage, embowered in honeysuckle and jasmine.

What strange impulses sometimes move a man in the depths of trouble!

Reginald threw open the window, thereby causing William to give a guilty start. He quickly recovered, however, on recognising his young master, and touched the flat plaid cap which he

seldom removed entirely from his head, while smiling in an embarrassed way as if not quite sure whether he was asleep or awake.

"Are you on your way to bed, William?"

"Yes, Master Reginald. Good-night, sir."

"Doesn't Redhall look pretty in the moonlight, William?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Reginald. Redhall always looks pretty enough to me, by night or day. I am walking about a bit, you see, though it is rather late."

The old man's joviality increased as his eyelids grew heavier. It was the first time since Reginald's return that he had had an opportunity to talk freely with him, as in the old Eton and Aldershot days.

"Just fancy, Mr. Reginald," he went on, "the old fox has littered just outside the garden-hedges. I took care not to tell Sir George. He likes sport well enough, but not as you do, Master Reginald. He would have ordered me to kill the cubs. I could have done it easily enough, but I thought what a pleasure it would be for Master Reginald to hunt the young foxes in October. He! he! The little devils have already eaten more rabbits and pheasants than they are worth, but I like to see you galloping through the park, Mr. Reginald. That will be in October."

"I fear not, William, but I thank you all the same. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

The young man watched the old servant returning to his tranquil home where he would

sleep secure of the morrow, and attached to the estate as firmly as its very walls. Closing the window, he rang for his man and ordered him to prepare everything for a journey and to give notice at the stables.

"It will be a long journey," he added. "This is what you are to pack for me." And seating himself at the table where the box of cigars and the volume of the laws of England were still lying, he hastily scrawled a few directions.

He then ascended the stairs, taking care to tread lightly lest some of the guests might overhear him and come out of their rooms to propose a moonlight walk or a row on the lake, as often happened at this hour.

He crossed the gallery leading into the left wing, and finally paused before a door bearing the inscription, "Princess Mary's Room." This was the chamber where a king's daughter had slept for a night, many years before.

As he approached, the door opened softly and Lady Breynolds appeared on the threshold, still in evening dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders.

"Oh, Reginald! Is it you?" she cried. "Tell me what has happened. I am dying of anxiety. Come quickly and tell me that there has been no violence."

"No, mother, only words; but those were decisive ones—I must go."

"That was what I feared. You have deserved it, then?"

"I have decided it."

“My poor, poor child!” Tender and terrified she opened her arms, with a splendid gesture, an unconsciously tragic figure, as she enfolded her tall son and drew him down beside her to listen to his story, stifling her own disapproval, the reproaches which her conscience inspired—since she was as firmly attached to the Established Church as her husband—but at this moment she hearkened to her motherly pity only.

At her side Reginald gave way to his grief. He shed no tears, but whereas with his father he had remained coldly respectful, alone with her and about to leave her, he made no attempt to hide his sorrow. He knew that as her child he inspired her with the tenderest pity, although his anguish of soul woke no responsive echoes in hers; that his disinterested and honourable motives were ignored by her who loved him, who was his mother, and who could only say:

“My Reginald, how can you be so cruel to yourself as well as to us?”

He yielded his hands to her fond clasp and in her heart she felt a secret pride that her handsome son, this splendid man-child who towered a head above her, was leaning to-night upon her maternal support as he had done in his childhood. She made no attempt to dissuade him from his purpose, knowing well that Reginald's resolves were not easily shaken. But she entered into all the details of his proposed journey with the instinct of one who has been a traveller, and for whom the names of remote lands and cities call up definite associations. She was full of motherly anxiety for him.

"How will you live, my child?" she cried. "You have those savings which I used to reproach you for laying by?"

"Yes. I shall spend all that now, and I hope to ask nothing from any one."

"But I can help you a little, Reginald, and I shall, for your father has never objected or even questioned me as to the use I make of my own money. Very little it is, as you know."

Her beautiful eyes, which were encircled by dark rings from the fatigue, emotion, and fever of the night, filled with tears as she sounded the depths of this sudden catastrophe, whose causes, alas! stretched so far into the past. She wept outright when Reginald admitted that Redhall might pass away from Sir George's first-born.

"Ah! how can I defend you when it is you who have condemned yourself? And I shall no longer be here when that wicked act of folly is accomplished."

"What do we know of the future?" he answered. "I will not be the slave even of a fortune, that is certain! But I am done now with theories and discussions. Beyond my promise and the present moment I affirm nothing. Only assure me that my name shall be spoken here sometimes, when you are alone, mother, or among my friends. And send me news often of Redhall."

He rose as he said this, and tried to smile, a grievous effort sometimes.

"Nearly two in the morning!" he exclaimed. "Poor mother! what a wretched night you have had."

"I would pray for many more like it, to have you still here, Reginald. When will you come back?"

"When my heart has changed—or yours and his."

"Alas!" And so they parted, but first Lady Breynolds insisted that her son should carry away some reminders of his home, things which had belonged in his own room or in the nursery, and she piled his arms up with photographs, a water-colour sketch, two or three books, and a few devotional pictures with texts. At three o'clock the carriage stood before the door, with lanterns lighted. The air was chill and day was dawning in the infinitude of space between the earth and stars. The meadows gleamed pale around the castle and the shrubs and hedge-rows stood out like the delicate traceries on a moss-agate. Reginald made a sign that the carriage was to follow him and walked slowly down the avenue, drawing his hands through the dewy shrubs as he passed, and laying his fingers with a caressing touch on the pendent branches of the trees from which the dew-drops trickled with a soft, dripping sound. "Thanks," he murmured, "dear trees of home."

At the turn in the path where the denser foliage was about to hide the walls of Redhall, he turned and faced the castle, with a lingering gaze over the slopes of lawn, the encircling trees, and the avenues opening like misty aisles into the forest beyond; then with a last look at his mother's window he hastened on to overtake the carriage.

There was no trace of tears on his fair young face, but his heart was weeping silently.

"You will inform madame as soon as she comes in that I am waiting for her in my study."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And I am at home to no one else."

M. Victor Limerel wore at this moment his business expression, which differed entirely from that which he wore in society. His formidable bulldog jaw and protruding underlip gave his face, at such times, a look of insolent strength and dogged obstinacy, with which his eyes harmonised, prominent, keen, and dark, beneath heavy bristling eyebrows. Although past sixty he had not a single white hair, and his moustache, which drooped at the corners of his mouth, was black except for a slight yellowish tinge from constant smoking. His neck was short, and below the broad shoulders his figure dwindled rapidly and was supported on thin, nervous limbs which bore this ill-shaped body about briskly.

All industrial and financial Paris knew the "Société Française des Filatures de Laine," whose principal factories were at Lille and Mazamet, and it was known to be in a prosperous condition owing to the exceptional ability of its owner and president. M. Victor Limerel was a great worker in his way, which was that of all originators. He took in all sides of an affair at a glance, as if he had studied it thoroughly, and he judged men in the same way, gave definite orders and never changed his mind. He possessed powers of com-

bination, foresight, and memory which would have taxed the brains of half a dozen ordinary men, but he endured the strain, thanks to his capacity for throwing aside all business cares on leaving his office or committee-room and never allowing them to encroach on his hours of leisure.

In doing this he became absolutely commonplace; talking fluently but without a spark of originality, his conversation being made up of echoes from the newspapers and the current talk of the day.

When any statement of his was contradicted he reaffirmed it with greater emphasis when it was for his interest to do so, and certain signs, such as a protruding of the jaw, the throbbing veins in his temples, and the nervous movements of the fingers, betrayed the man's relentless will, his pride in his unvarying success, and his experience of the weakness of human nature.

This curtness in expressing his opinions was confined, however, to subjects where his personal interests were involved. On other questions, and those the deepest and highest, he showed a surprising readiness in yielding to the feeblest opposition, and claimed credit for this as evidence of a broad tolerance.

Many of his relations with the political world were explicable only through this facility for compromise.

It was generally understood that he was loftily indifferent where principles were concerned, jealous and tenacious only on personal questions.

M. Limerel had always refused to present him-

self as a political candidate, but he passed for a Conservative, no one knew precisely why. His opponents, however, recognised the conservatism of the man of wealth rather than that of the man of convictions.

His wife had formal orders to cultivate social relations in all parties, and these she obeyed implicitly, receiving people of every shade of opinion who might be able to serve her husband in his twin ambitions of being appointed an officer of the Legion of Honour and a manager of the Suez Canal.

He had married a Mlle. Elsa Pommeau, many years younger than himself, the daughter of a banker, who had brought him a large fortune, with the additional dowry of a wealth of blonde hair, superb shoulders, and a smile always the same, which came at her bidding.

She was neither an ill-meaning woman nor a nonentity, but twenty years of an unvarying social round had filled her with a set of conventional ideas, prejudices, and tastes which belonged to her world rather than to herself. She repeated scandal without a grain of malice; and, without coquetry, resorted to every device known to art to preserve the remnants of her youth and freshness in order that she might still figure among the vanguard of pretty women. Yet subject as she was to her husband and to the world, something of her real self—of the woman she might have been, enthusiastic, kind, and tender—still survived within her. When alone or with her husband and son, she allowed herself at times to

think and feel in accordance with her true nature and early principles, expressing herself in vague phrases such as: "You are going too far. I was not brought up with such ideas as that. Do as you please, but I cannot share your opinions." This, however, was the extent of her courage. Sometimes, at long intervals, she strayed into a church and knelt with bowed head, sighing profoundly, forming good resolutions for the future, and commending to Heaven all who were dear to her, especially her son. Those who saw her in this attitude pronounced her exceedingly devout, and if she chanced to hear the expression she did not attempt to deny it.

Such was the companion whose fortune and conduct, whose conversation and thoughts, were completely under M. Limerel's control. She lived in dread of his harsh voice, his self-confidence, his arguments, his mockery, and his bursts of anger when she attempted to resist him; she regarded him as a tyrant and yet she loved him. She was not always convinced by his arguments, but since he commanded must she not obey and thus preserve their domestic peace at any price?

Nothing had ever cost her so dear as the complete ignoring of her natural authority on the part of her husband in his plans and negotiations for Félicien's marriage.

M. Limerel regarded this transaction as one of the highest importance, and accordingly as his exclusive affair. This marriage was to facilitate that worldly advancement which he called a family concern; that is, one designed for the benefit of

the head of the family. Among the young girls whose fathers were men of influence he had singled out Mlle. Tourette and had said to Félicien:

"There is a charming girl!"

He might as well have said:

"There is a girl whose father is influential! Baron Tourette is a power: marry his daughter and you will be doing me a service. She is a charming girl besides."

He was not mistaken on these two points, but upon another which he had not taken into consideration.

Mlle. Tourette was a pretty girl, rich and well connected, but Félicien refused outright to have his choice dictated to him. He begged his parents to delay further steps until he had made up his mind to be married.

"That is mere shyness," M. Limerel replied. "The fear of not pleasing. I know you, my dear boy. But let me introduce you to her. I feel fairly sure what her answer will be, and perfectly sure of yours when once you have seen her. She is bewitching."

Félicien had yielded finally for the sake of peace, merely saying, "Very well, I will go with you." Accordingly the preliminaries, discreetly conducted between M. Limerel and the Baroness Tourette, had led to the following agreement. "Marguerite shall know nothing about it," said her mother, "but I will take her with me to the Salon. You remember that huge canvas by Wambez, of a group of Sorbonne professors showing off their robes? Well, at three o'clock pre-

cisely we will be in front of that picture, and you can meet us there by chance. Unless I am mistaken, the portraits of those old gentlemen will serve as a becoming background to Marguerite. The dear child will have an opportunity for a little chat with your son, and that is all we can do. We can insure their meeting but not their liking each other."

"Certainly not."

"You will be there then?"

"At three precisely, Madame, and the result is easily foreseen."

This was the interview from which M. Victor Limerel had this moment returned. He had made a point of going alone with Félicien. "You would spoil everything, my dear," he had said to his wife. "Your flushed cheeks and the very tone of your voice would betray your feelings. Leave it all to me and when I bring him back a conqueror, you will not regret it." He had long ago settled that there was no place for her in his diplomatic triumphs. He was now awaiting her with an impatience he could with difficulty control. At last he heard a light step on the stairs, and a moment later the handsome Mme. Limerel threw open the door and as she entered cried breathlessly: "Well, what about my son?" This natural cry came from so full a heart that M. Limerel was actually moved by it and almost forgot to reproach his wife for keeping him waiting, but he exclaimed, nevertheless, with a gesture of impatience: "The interview was a failure—an utter failure! And all owing to you."

"I have no doubt of that. As long as I live, every failure will be owing to me. To be sure, I was not there and you were, but that does not matter. Tell me everything. Where did you meet them? Oh, my poor boy, how he must be suffering! Was it that little chit who did not care for him?"

"Not at all, *ma chère*, it was he—he alone. How could you fancy such a thing? That is just like you. A disappointment quite upsets your judgment."

"But tell me, tell me everything. You see I cannot wait. Where did you meet?"

"We were standing, Félicien and I, with our backs to that great Sorbonne picture in the long gallery. I was gazing with deep interest at a marine view of a stormy sea, and explaining to Félicien the reasons for my admiration, which he did not share, but all the time I was watching for the Tourettes out of the corner of my eye. At a few minutes past three I caught sight of them coming up the grand stairway. They were about to pass us when I stepped forward. 'My dear Limerel, is that you?' exclaimed Tourette. 'What a surprise!'"

"How did he appear?"

"He was out of breath but as cordial as ever, friendly even. I am sure that he favours the match. I am used to reading men, and his manner was unmistakable."

"And how was the mother?"

"Very dignified, as usual. But she had come, and that in spite of a headache."

"And Mlle. Marguerite? What of her?"

"She was the prettiest Parisienne there, in a frame or out. A perfect little Greuze in a mousquetaire hat. She has a clever mouth, a retroussé nose, and sparkling eyes under long, drooping lids. But you have seen her. She evidently knew, but showed no signs of embarrassment. Quite at her ease, lively and amusing. She led the way with Félicien, saying: 'I am quite at home at the Salon, Monsieur. Let us come this way.' We followed, tacitly agreeing to fall a little way behind. She talked vivaciously, raising her pretty arm to point things out to him. Félicien hardly spoke. We thought all was going naturally, but we could say nothing about it yet." And M. Limerel proceeded to describe the interview, dwelling chiefly on the rôle played by the personage who interested him most, namely: himself, his diplomacy and tact, his repartees.

Mme. Limerel's ardent interest, the mute interrogation of her parted lips, impressed even him, the least indulgent of men towards what he styled motherly sentiment. This mother, with dark rings of anxiety around her eyes, crouching in the easy-chair by the fireside in a posture of suspense, with no concern for her fresh toilette, with her veil rolled back unbecomingly and her hat awry, was no longer the handsome, expressionless, blonde Mme. Limerel whom he was wont to dominate, but a being all quivering life and primitive passion.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "I see it all—your meeting, your walk through the gallery together. I

hear your words and their replies, but the end—the end?”

“Well, when I took leave of the Baron and Baroness Tourette in the lower hall, nearly an hour later, and left them lingering awhile, for form’s sake, in the sculpture-gallery, I immediately asked Félicien: ‘What do you think of her?’ His reply, which is stamped indelibly on my brain, was: ‘She is charming, father, for some one else, but I am not marrying. I warned you, you know.’ ‘And your reasons, if you please?’ I inquired. ‘I might give you any number, but one will be enough to prevent any further attempts like this of to-day: I have resolved to marry no one save my cousin Marie.’”

“He said that!”

“He said just that—‘No one save my cousin Marie.’ ‘Your cousin?’ I replied; ‘I will not permit it, do you hear?’ ‘My mind is made up,’ he said, and upon that we came out. My dear, I was furious. I said everything that could be said. I pointed out the folly of marrying a girl who could not bring him even four hundred thousand francs, and who had no important connections, except in a circle which no longer counts for anything. I pointed out that when a young man wishes to make his way in the diplomatic world he cannot afford to begin by a blunder. I explained that there are certain obligations for people of our fortune, that in the upper bourgeoisie a man’s choice is as strictly limited as that of a prince, unless he means to abdicate—and Félicien is abdicating. He will never ‘arrive’!

It is like setting out on his career armed with a prayer-book instead of a copy of Macchiavelli. I told him all this and much besides. He merely replied with more sentimental speeches, telling me how lovely Marie was."

"So she is."

"And Mlle. Tourette? Is she not lovely, too?"

"But Marie has such elevation of mind, such distinction of nature!"

"Define distinction, will you? The little Tour-ette girl is a thousand times more 'chic,' and that is distinction nowadays, *ma chère*. And even if she hasn't already those wonderful qualities that Félicien is dreaming of, she is very young, and he can form her to suit his own ideal. Is not a husband the real educator of a wife of twenty? Can he not refine her to any extent?"

"We are an example of the contrary, *mon ami*. I was under twenty when you married me."

"I beg of you—I am in no mood for jesting."

"Nor I, I assure you. Nor of serious contradiction either. I am merely offering a plea on behalf of that poor boy who is not here to defend himself. Why do you look at me so sternly?"

M. Limerel rose, tossing down an ivory paper-knife with which he had been slashing the air while he spoke, and began pacing slowly back and forth between window and door, with his arms folded and his eyes fixed steadily upon his wife, who had risen, too, and was evidently beginning to waver.

"Because it is you who are really responsible,"

he replied. "You have encouraged Félicien in all these foolish tastes which are opposed to mine."

"We are discussing his marriage, Victor."

"We are discussing his whole future, which he is about to compromise. If you had not filled him with a lot of idealistic notions which make me uneasy about him—yes, yes, I repeat it, uneasy—these notions of excessive piety, for instance——"

"What do you call excessive?"

"Whatever stands in one's way, *parbleu*."

"Alas! he has given up all religious practices, much to my regret indeed."

"I am not concerned with that. What I complain of is that he is essentially romantic and mystical."

"Poor boy! He has a little spark of enthusiasm in his nature, which he inherits, perhaps, from me."

"Not at all, my dear. He is, as I say, a mystic. I insist upon it that he lives and breathes in an unreal atmosphere. He has a taste for pious romance, and he imagines Marie to be a sort of Madonna or archangel."

"He loves her."

"I call it morbid nonsense and ignorance of the world, or pure folly, whichever you like."

Mme. Limerel, weary of contending and fully aware of the uselessness of such discussions, resumed her society voice, and in her sweetest and most amiable tones replied: "I do not wish to displease you, *mon ami*. What do you wish me to do?"

"What do I wish? That you should speak to your son and dissuade him from this mad idea.

He will listen to you better than he does to me. You have influence over him."

"I shall make him suffer all the more. But since you wish it I will try my best. Where did he go when he left you?"

"To the Foreign Office, where he had an appointment. He will soon be back. I leave you. He will come expecting to find me here, and will find you instead."

"Are you not afraid of his having an ally?"

"Whom do you mean? My sister-in-law? I wrote to her about it in England and have had an answer."

"Which you never showed me."

"True, true! But it was an excellent reply. Oh, she will make no attempt to catch my son! Her principles are even stricter than yours. She is exasperating, but at the same time reassuring, for I feel secure against any manœuvring on her part. It is only Marie whom I fear, with her ardent nature under that air of reserve. She and Félicien have always been on such terms of intimacy that I never foresaw this danger. Of course she cannot help loving him."

"Yes, with a cousinly affection."

"Oh, I know those cousinly affections which are nothing more or less than love in disguise. Marie has eyes and intelligence. She is aware that my son is a charming and advantageous *parti*; that he has a fortune and will go far. It is against her that you will have to work. You must simply tell him that you regard such a marriage as impossible and that it would pain you deeply.

There! I hear the outside door close; it must be Félicien. Tell him you have not seen me yet. Do not turn pale like that! It is nonsense! When will you be a real woman—a woman of strong will?"

Mme. Limerel kept her eyes fixed upon the doorway through which her husband disappeared, saying to herself, "When will you be a real man, with a man's heart?" At this decisive moment she was terrified to find herself alone and forced to act against her natural instincts, and indeed against her sense of right and justice.

As Félicien entered and bent his eyes upon her with a look of tender inquiry, she threw her whole diplomacy into assuming an attitude of easy unconsciousness. Slowly she began removing her jewelled hat-pins and laying her flower-trimmed hat upon the table before her while she carefully smoothed a stray lock of hair with the tips of her fingers.

"Has father not come in yet?" he inquired.

"Not yet, dearest. You have just returned from the Salon—from seeing—? In short, how were you pleased?"

Félicien had a clear, direct glance, and true French eyes, by turns clever, appealing, mocking, and coaxing, but with too many vagrant thoughts passing through them. His pale, youthful countenance, with close-cut brown hair, budding moustache, and a prominent chin like his father's, gave him the air of a student, while a certain elegance in the carriage of his head and in the supple outlines of his figure recalled the portrait of some

young Florentine noble of the Renaissance clad in a silken doublet, with a jewelled poniard in his belt.

He embraced his mother without replying, and after a moment's pause said:

"Come, sit down here beside me, won't you? I need your help."

"Ah, my child! when you are once men we mothers are of so little use. You think I can help you still? It does me good to hear that."

For answer he took her hand and led her to a sofa, where he seated himself beside her, and bent forward with a look of trouble in his eyes.

She drew herself up and listened intently, with a serious expression on her pretty, doll-like face. At certain words he spoke her eyelids drooped as if pained by what he said, at other moments she turned white, with a faint murmur, "It is impossible. That is an illusion. It is too late." It was evident that she suffered at seeing him suffer, and at not daring to console him.

"I am very unhappy," he began.

"What is it, my child?"

"There are only three of us at home and you and my father do not agree."

"Indeed we do! Why do you say that?"

"Well, he and I disagree on a very serious subject, and I do not know whether you will side with me or with him."

"Tell me, is it about this marriage? If Baron Tourette's daughter does not please you, your father and I will look out for some other young girl."

"I have already found that other."

"Heavens! Who is she?"

"One who is very dear to us."

"What! Your cousin Marie?"

"Yes, Marie. You know how fond she has always been of you."

"That is true."

"And you have always taken her part. What better daughter could you ask for? She will not have to learn to love you. If you will only help me, mother!"

"No, you go too fast, Félicien. It is out of the question."

"Why out of the question?" and he looked her straight in the eyes, while she tried to evade his glances as she murmured:

"Your career, your fortune, require a totally different marriage."

"Poor mamma! You have evidently seen my father. You are merely echoing him."

She did not venture to deny it again, and he withdrew from her a little as she said:

"I don't know whether your father will change his mind later. Possibly he may, but it is safest not to approach him at first."

"You wish me to wait? You, too?"

"Yes, my dear child."

"Then I will, but not without being sure that Marie cares for me. That I must know, and within the hour. I am going at once to ask her."

"You have not spoken to her yet?"

"No. I wished to wait until I had passed my examinations and felt myself a man."

"And yet you consented to go to this rendezvous of your father's?"

"Yes, in order to have one more argument on my side, to be able to say to him: I have seen them both and I love only Marie."

"But it is quite impossible, my son. A marriage cannot be arranged like this, on the spur of the moment."

"I have loved her for years."

"Without telling your parents, Félicien?"

"Since you are both against me, I must speak for myself. I shall go to her at once—but will she consent?"

Mme. Limerel shook her blonde head and smiled in spite of her trouble. "How can you doubt it? A girl who knows you!"

"No, you do not quite understand—there are certain things—Marie is very superior to others."

"And what of you, Félicien?" cried his mother, throwing her arms around her son's neck and drawing down to her the sensitive face drawn and vibrating with emotion. "I am weak," she added, kissing him. "I ought not to let you see that I forgive you. I do not approve, and I fully agree with your father. You cannot imagine how upset I am by all this. At the very moment, too, when our fondest wish for you was about to be realised, you ruin everything. We have always lived so united and happy until now."

"Yes, but only by avoiding all vital questions. I fear, dearest mother, that our peace was the result of a weak compromise."

"Alas! could not things last as they were?"

"You see, dear, that they could not."

"And what am I to say to your father?"

"Tell him that I have gone to see Marie," and as he spoke Félicien arose and left his mother seated alone on the sofa, weeping silently, but all unconscious of the deeper causes of her tears.

The distance was short between the hôtel of the Victor Limerels and the apartment occupied by Marie and her mother in the Avenue d'Antin. Félicien walked rapidly, pondering upon what he should say to his cousin, what her replies would be, and building up a score of possible romances. He recalled the whole past which bound him to Marie, and saw her once more a child on the beach at St. Lunaire, where the two families had been in the habit of spending their summers, or in the Tuileries gardens which he used to cross daily on his way to and from his college, and where he often lingered to watch his little cousin skipping rope, or running to and fro among the other girls, as lithe and frolicsome as a young kid. He saw her in short skirts at that uncertain age when her smile began to change, as a ripening fruit takes on a tinge of colour—Marie, whose proud glance held one aloof from her realm of virginal thoughts and whom he loved even then with a timid, jealous affection, feeling her to be different from the other girls whom he flirted with at balls—this cousin of his who was clever without diplomas, this very pretty girl who remained simple, this Parisienne who had bloomed in a chosen circle, and who, as he knew, looked with a shade of youthful severity on the mixed social

relations of his father's family—that a girl of twenty, so gifted, could remain long without being loved, sought, and won was incredible. He had suffered therefore during this six weeks' absence, this English journey of which he knew so little. Whom had she met over there? What new influences had coloured her girlish image of an ideal hero? This vague fear was one of the secret causes which had decided him to seek Marie at once.

Mme. Limerel lived on the third floor of a house in the Avenue d'Antin. On being informed by the maid that madame was out, but that mademoiselle was at home, Félicien became so agitated that he could barely stammer: "Do not announce me. I will go and find her."

"Mademoiselle is in the dining-room, writing," the maid said, and as she opened the door Marie sprang up and came to meet her cousin. Dropping him a deep curtsy, she exclaimed laughingly, "Good-morning, Excellency. To what do I owe this honour? Sit down, Félicien," she added. "You see I have taken possession once more of my favourite nook for writing, where I have a better light and less noise than on the avenue side."

And as she spoke she reseated herself at a table in the large bay-window, overlooking a court-yard with low walls, over which a glimpse could be caught of the tree-tops of a garden on the Faubourg St. Honoré.

"I have hardly caught sight of you since you came back from England, Marie."

"True. That so-called family party of ours the other evening was not precisely an intimate gathering, and mamma's dozens of special friends were very monopolising."

"It will be the same at our house; we shall be almost by ourselves at dinner, but in the evening a hundred people are coming and there is to be music. Besides, people always try to monopolise you! When it is not a nice old lady, it is a man, young or old, who wants to sit beside you because he enjoys talking to a lovely girl, and who accounts for it by saying, 'Oh, yes! she is so clever and cultivated!' All of which is quite true."

"Come, Félicien, spare me. We girls have to pass our examinations, too, you know, and they are not always the most amusing ones. Well, here you are, a man with a career before you—the career of all others! They must have been delighted at home."

"Yes, but it was a delight that did not last."

"Do you know any that do?"

"Not yet."

And as their eyes met for a moment, Marie blushed and bit her lips, realising that she had heedlessly said the wrong thing and brought the conversation to a dangerous point. She began nervously toying with the letter which lay before her. But Marie Limerel was one of those perfectly frank and courageous natures which hesitate only at the start, and having once chosen their path go straight towards the duty before them. Her delicate profile stood out like an antique cameo against the light behind her, and

as she spoke she involuntarily lifted her hand, as if taking a vow.

"If you have anything to say to me, speak at once while we are alone, and let there be only truth between us," she said.

"You will answer me with perfect sincerity?"

"Indeed I will."

"Marie, my cousin Marie, do you love me a little?"

"I love you very much, Félicien, and always have from childhood."

"Yes, I know and I believe you, but that is not what I am asking for now. Do you love me enough to be my wife? For my part I have long since passed from a cousinly affection for *you* to a deep and ardent love. I have compared you with other girls and found you superior to them all—I can truly say it—you so good, so loyal, who pass through this stupid society in which we all find ourselves, without resembling it in your look, your speech, or your heart. You so young——"

"So young! Oh, Félicien! I have sometimes asked myself why you were no longer young."

"You have thought of me then? Even if it were only to blame me, I thank you for giving me a place in your thoughts. Had you guessed? Did you know?"

"Yes, I sometimes thought so. But listen, I could love with my whole heart only one who gave me a love such as I have dreamed of."

"Ardent, enthusiastic, reverent, Marie? Mine is all these."

"I wish for more, far more."

"Pure then? You are questioning me as to my past? You reproach me with infidelities to you—which have been few, I assure you."

"You are mistaken. I might perhaps pardon all this to one who asked for pardon."

"Perhaps, you say?"

"Yes, for I am not yet called upon to make that sacrifice. I do not know. But what I do ask for above all, is that there should be no thought that kept us apart; that we should have but one soul between us."

"Ah! We have come to it at last. I have been fearing, Marie, that you would ask me to be like you."

"Have we the same faith? Are you a Catholic still? Understand me: I know that you continue to go to mass and would accompany your wife there. I see that through family tradition you remain respectful to Catholic ideas, ceremonies, and customs. But to be outwardly respectful, *mon ami*, is not enough, it is not living by faith as I wish to live. It pains me to speak to you like this. I am being hard to myself. But it would be such a disillusion if I found that my husband could not pray with me—was not inspired in all his acts by that faith which is truly *all* of me. You think me pretty and I am touched by that. But other girls are pretty, too. Why have you chosen me? What you love in me, I truly believe, is this inner faith, Félicien."

"That may be, Marie; there has always been a mystery about you."

"No, only a sheltered youth. A will which would be weak of itself, but has been fortified from childhood and directed upward with admirable tenderness. I see so many wrecks about me! I feel that with most men I should be imperilling my soul and my happiness. I should like—but do not laugh at me."

"On the contrary. Speak and let me look into the paradise of your soul. I promise you to answer truly. What would you like?"

"That my marriage should have about it something of the eternal. I believe those to be poor marriages which are not formed to last forever. I think that the family one founds should have echoes before and after. I should wish to be the mother of a saintly race."

"You deserve to be, Marie. But that other, where will you find him? I know a few men who think like you and who live as you say—they are far better than I, but they do not love you. They might pass near you without knowing all you are worth. What nobler work, moreover, than to bring back to God the man you have chosen?"

"To-day that can no longer be done, Félicien. I should have the whole world to struggle against. I could not bring it to pass."

"And yet, little Marie, Christian virgins have married pagans."

"They were forced to in those days. Besides, those pagans had never known the true life."

"And we?"

"The pagans of to-day are Christians blighted.

I am sure of it. They will not revive in pure water like a drooping spray of lilac."

"But in tears they may," and he tried to laugh.

"Yes, perhaps in tears," and as she spoke the tears sprang to his eyes. He did not attempt to hide them, but bent his head and gazed at Marie as if she were already far away. And not being able to endure the sorrowful love expressed in his gaze, Marie looked back at him for a moment, then closed her eyes. Pity was growing within her.

"My poor Félicien! how I hurt you!" she cried.

"No, not you, not you, Marie. It is not your fault. You make me suffer, but only by showing me the gulf between us. The fault is in those who are not like you. I am trying to defend myself, you see, because I love you. The words you speak I feel to be true; you are doubtless right, but I no longer feel sure. That is the hardest thing I have to own to you. I do not often think about the faith that once was mine, lest I should find that there is no vestige of it left."

"Do not say that, Félicien. You are surely mistaken."

"I hope it may be so——"

"Oh, yes!—do not answer me at once. You are not sure; take time to examine yourself."

"You did think better of me then, Marie. You did not believe that I had so changed for the worse. I bless you for suffering, too."

"See! you are using the words of our faith. You say, I bless you."

"That is what is left to me, alas! Words, sounds, regrets."

"Cling to these regrets; they are the first steps on the return path. Do not say any longer that you do not believe. Do not accuse yourself; study yourself."

She had bent forward and taken Félicien's hand. She consoled him, she pitied him with her whole young, tender soul which saw him weep for love.

"Yes, I will try," he answered. "But can you who have never changed, understand? I admire this religion which I once loved, but I no longer turn to it. I say, 'It is beautiful,' but do not adhere to its precepts. My soul has become inert, my will no longer obeys my intelligence. I regret not believing but make no effort to throw off this burden of doubt. There is a force within me which is dead or sleeping, I do not know which. And it is on the solution of this problem that you make my fate depend!"

"How can it be so? You who went to a college directed by priests. You—brought up by them!"

"Yes, but not *taught*. That is a different matter. They did what they could, or nearly so. If their work had not been destroyed I might have been the man you could love, Marie. Let us not seek out who caused this ruin. Evidently it was I. I in the first place, but—we might discover those whom I refuse to name. That is an abyss I dread to cross."

Marie rose with an imploring gesture, saying:

"Do not answer any further now. I can be sure that you will tell me the whole truth. Take time to study yourself and you will find some delusions

melt away which blind you as to your genuine beliefs. Go Félicien, I have hope."

"Dear Marie, what an angel you are!"

"And while you are thinking, I will pray." He stood dry-eyed before her now, as pale as she, but not daring to look in the face he loved, lest he should no longer be master of himself when once he met these eyes so full of compassion. He gazed downwards at her long, slender hands as he said:

"Marie, we are the victims of the time. I am like this society which is perishing amidst its pleasures, while you are among the chosen few reserved for a resurrection. I have never seen as I do to-night what it is that has ceased to live within me. I will do as you bid. I will try to find myself amidst these ruins."

"If you see the evil, renounce it."

"Ah, Marie! how many see the evil but have neither the will nor the grace to be cured."

"Not the grace, you mean."

"You cannot comprehend such poverty of soul, you the ardent, the devoted."

"If my love could bind you to the faith again! But no, it is not enough; strength must come from above. I will pray for it."

"Tell me, Marie," he said imploringly, "when shall we see each other again? You are so dear, so despairingly dear to me."

"We shall meet at my aunt's to-morrow, but I beg you to say nothing to me there. I beg you to avoid speaking of this. Let days and days pass. Do not condemn us too soon."

"*Us!*—ah, how good you are!"

"Adieu, Félicien."

"Pray for us both, Marie." And so they clasped hands and parted, that rapid pressure of the fingers expressing the mutual loyalty of their young souls.

Félicien had no desire to return home at once. He was too agitated to meet his father's eyes, his mind was too bitterly stirred. All his youth rose up before him, all his past years brought their testimony, saying to him: "What do you believe? How can you be a man of faith? During your whole childhood you were left to the care of servants for whom you were merely a small, crying creature whom they were forced to tend at night in the absence of your parents. What poor guardian angels! For one who joined your hands and taught you to lisp a prayer, how many hurried you to bed without a thought of heaven, such as a child needs, to be wholly a child? What study have you ever made of religion? During your school days the thought of graduation usurped the place of all else. In college a moderate place was allotted to religious instruction, sufficient, doubtless, when parents bear their part or show its influence in their lives. There were some zealous priests who tried to pour something of the divine into these minds absorbed with the world, steeped in its tumult, assailed by all the influences of the streets, the newspapers, the theatre, books, and their own passionate natures, and finding in their pursuits of pleasure reason enough for doubt and denial.

These priests, moved by Christian charity and wise in the knowledge which fortifies the soul, won some minds to the truth forever, others merely to an outward respect which could not endure. You were among these last! How soon the teachings of the Church were obscured by all you heard uttered or implied at home or in society—talk which your mother half disapproved, but to which she listened with a courteous smile, while your father constantly affirmed that an honest man could dispense with religion and philosophy, without a thought of the young soul beside him hearing all this and seeing how those about him lived their lives with no regard for the creed they repeated. Thus your youth was passed!”

And as his retrospect continued, Félicien recalled one unhappy date in particular. It was while he was pursuing his law studies that a sense of his utter unworthiness had led him to abstain from the Easter communion, of which his mother had partaken alone. On their return home no explanation had followed, only a timid remonstrance on her part, ignored by his father.

And now Marie had brought all this past to life again and forced him to ask himself: “What do you still believe? What promise can you make to this pure soul? What sympathy can there be between her and you?—Descend deeper into your conscience, suffer and perhaps in the inmost depths you may find buried the germ of some force which is still alive.”

After wandering through the streets and avenues of the Etoile quarter until the clock struck

eight, Félicien finally turned homeward. His mother, on hearing the vestibule door open, stepped forward to meet him.

"How long you have been gone!" she cried. "I have said nothing to your father. He is upstairs."

"Do not say anything to him now," Félicien answered.

"I cannot for a moment believe that she has refused you!"

"Do not question me, mother; let me reflect in silence. I am in need of rest and thought before giving the answer I have promised."

"Ah! so much the better, since the decision rests with you."

"Yes—" he began, then stopped with a sigh and passed his hand gently over his mother's brow, which he had never before seen so seamed with care, saying:

"Do not be unhappy, mother—the time has not come yet. All I can say is that the happiness or misery of my life lies in the word I shall have to say to her, and you can do nothing—nothing." And in a lower tone he added, "Nothing now!"

On the morning of Tuesday, the twenty-second of June, Mme. Victor Limerel received a note from her sister-in-law, to which she sent the following reply:

"Certainly, dear Madeleine, I shall be charmed to see your Englishman. He will meet a number

of people here, for our friends all wish to celebrate my son's success with us. And you will notice that the date is well chosen, since we are on the eve of St. Felix.

"Why do you not bring M. Breynolds to dinner, so that he may get to know us a little before the other guests arrive, and so find a few conversational islands in this ocean of strangers? And besides, without him we shall be thirteen at table.

"Your sister and friend,

"POMMEAU VICTOR LIMEREL.

"P. S. Félicien, to whom I have just read this note, jeers at my superstition. But I insist; bring me the fourteenth."

On the very day of his departure from Redhall, Reginald had embarked for Ostend. He had passed the first week or two of his voluntary exile with friends in Belgium. Then, armed with letters of introduction, he had taken the train for Paris, drawn thither by a definite and deliberate purpose. "I will see them at home," he thought. "I will study these Catholics in their lives and works. I will attend their gatherings and hear them speak; and for this purpose I will go to France where religion is the oldest, the most creative, the most apostolic, and the most bitterly opposed. I shall not frequent theatres or galleries, since I am bound on this one quest. I do not care about those other things, they can come later." For this reason, and one other, he had rejected the idea which had occurred to him more than once,

of paying a visit to the two French ladies who had been witnesses of his recent experiences and guests at his home. Some words he had himself spoken also restrained him. He had said to his little friend Dorothy, speaking of Marie: "I shall not see her again." It was childish, no doubt, but these words seemed binding to his tenacious nature, so little used to reversing his decisions, even in trifling matters. Nevertheless, one evening as he was returning to his hotel somewhat lonely and sad, he caught sight of the lighted windows of Mme. Limerel's apartment, and a youthful longing for one more glimpse of pretty Marie Limerel carried the day.

Although Marie and her mother had welcomed him with a cordial friendliness authorised by the weeks spent at Westgate, he had appeared at first cold and formal. They found him as distant as on the first evening when Lady Breyholds had presented her son to the two French ladies. It was evident that the sort of confidence which had sprung up on English soil between Reginald and Marie had not crossed the Channel, and it hardly seemed as if the correct and silent young man who replied to their questions only in monosyllables could ever have walked and talked with Marie in the park at home.

Mme. Limerel, who was equally surprised at this perfunctory conversation broken by frequent pauses, suddenly asked:

"You would, perhaps, like to make a few acquaintances in Paris, Monsieur?"

"Thank you, no; I do not care to do so."

"It is sight-seeing then that interests you?"

He had laughed as he answered: "Not especially." But they had caught an expression in his eyes revealing that here was a soul on its guard.

"I do not mean, you understand, that you should climb into one of those vans on the Place de l'Opéra which carry your compatriots all over Paris. But I thought that coming here for the first time you might have laid out some plan of study or amusement, and knowing you I feel quite sure it would be study."

"Yes, some friends of mine in Belgium have given me a few letters of introduction." And he said no more on the subject of the use he was making of his time in Paris.

Naturally no allusion was made to the discussions which had led to Reginald's sudden departure from Redhall, and which had caused so much talk in the little Westgate circle. Mme. Limerel inquired for Sir George and Lady Breyholds as if quite unaware of the scenes that had passed, even before her own eyes.

Reginald was touched by this reserve, and though he gave no sign, he said within himself: "These are thoroughly well-bred people, since they appear the same at home in Paris as they did in England."

For in his inmost thoughts he had entertained a suspicion that English surroundings had acted as a check upon a certain exuberance and frivolity of mind and speech which he believed to be French characteristics.

Accordingly when Mme. Limerel had suggested

his accompanying them to her sister-in-law's on the next evening but one, he accepted with an eagerness which proved that he had been charmed as well as surprised by his visit.

"I do not propose your coming for the society you will meet there," she added, "since you have admitted your unsociableness——"

"And besides, it is not precisely *our* society," interpolated Marie.

"—but on account of the music, which will be excellent."

Thus it was that on the evening of the twenty-second, on the stroke of eight, Reginald Breynolds was being presented to the guests of the Victor Limerels.

These included first a young Pommeau couple, relatives of Mme. Limerel's, the husband, a partner in the automobile firm of Mohl & Gerq, being commonly known as "Pommeau des automobiles," as in Rome they speak of Pietro dei Massimi. Next came an old Councillor of State who dined impartially in all sets and at all seasons, invariably telling one good story after the Burgundy to pay his scot and end the dinner jovially, then, after a cigar in the smoking-room, he departed with a sense of duty accomplished. There were also the banker Ploute and his wife. He was the manager of several big companies, very clever, and wealth incarnate; while she was wealth incarnate and very dull. She was also exceedingly blonde, and her sloping shoulders were more laden with diamonds than those of any other woman in

good society. Diplomacy was represented by a young secretary of legation, who had wished to pay the new attaché the compliment of dining with him elsewhere than at a ministerial function; he was a youth of mild and modest speech, with a collection of terrible anecdotes against his neighbour. Then came M. de Semoville, whose wife had declined at the eleventh hour; an amateur sculptor who attributed his lack of success in the artistic world exclusively to his birth and station, and made no secret of his envy of his untitled rivals. Finally there were the cousins Bourguillière, a thick-set, sturdy couple—the wife with something of the imposing mien of a Roman matron—who ostensibly spent the entire year in the country, absorbed in the management of a great estate from which Madame derived yearly profits of twenty-five thousand francs on her dairy alone. Renowned as they were for their rural, agricultural, equine, and bovine experiences, this couple were to be met with in Paris whenever they could snatch a moment from their fields and flocks, in other words, incessantly.

This small, intimate dinner, as Mme. Limerel called it, was actually made up of professional diners-out who were in the habit of meeting regularly at the same table. It was noticeable for the silent, rapid ease of the service, and for the complete absence of originality in the conversation. At first the great mill-owner took the lead—as though he were presiding at a board meeting—evidently under the impression that he was stimulating discussion and a free interchange

of ideas. He did in fact draw out a variety of contradictory opinions on a vast number of topics grave and gay, but these themes were soon exhausted, as the company in general knew very little about them, and cared still less.

Regular habitués of society recognise this fact, but Reginald, who had lived in various countries but never in France, secretly admired the versatility of these French people, their vivacity, the appositeness of an occasional repartee, which may have served before but which reappears from time to time under a slight disguise. He was amused, in short, by all he heard, having sufficient sense of humour to appreciate the happy hits. He was greatly entertained by M. de Semoville's experiences at the art auctions, of which he was a regular devotee; as well as by the councillor's piquant anecdotes, one of which was pronounced by the knowing M. Pommeau to be "fresh from the mint."

As he was communicating his impressions, mostly in English, to Marie, who sat beside him, he suddenly became aware that he was the person expected to speak next, and say something entirely new. For it is a law on such occasions, frequently verified, that a guest who may be supposed to have something worth saying, is not called upon at once, but has his cue given him after the first courses are over.

The habitués naturally wish, before giving their attention to new-comers, to display their own little talents, to gossip awhile, and to make themselves agreeable to their partners. The saddle of mutton had accordingly been served when M.

Pommeau "of the automobiles," in replying to some question of his neighbour's, remarked audibly: "Oh, yes, we have Monsieur Breynolds here, who knows India thoroughly."

"That is true!" exclaimed M. Limerel, in the tones of a whipper-in sounding the rally. "Perfectly! He has held a command in the most savage regions."

"Where was it, may I ask, Monsieur Breynolds?" said the fair Mme. Ploute, whose complexion had cost several millions and had won for her the heart of M. Ploute, and who in speaking moved only her pretty, rose-tinted lips, while the lines of her face remained immovable and expressionless.

Reginald, embarrassed at being obliged to speak French before the whole table, merely replied:

"Sixteenth Rajput regiment, stationed at Manipur in Assam."

This cast a momentary chill over the company, while every one was trying to locate Assam. The first to recover was the secretary of legation, who said: "Oh, yes, Assam, a province of British India on the north-east frontier of China, very savage in fact——"

"Because I visited India on my wedding-trip," resumed Mme. Ploute. "Do you think the Hindoo women so amazingly pretty, Monsieur?"

After that, the trigger having been pulled, each took his turn at questioning Reginald. He defended himself as well as he was able, replying at first only in the briefest phrases.

Some one alluded to Sisowath and its dancers. Mme. Ploute, who was more used to being looked at

than listened to, keenly enjoyed the new sensation of leading the conversation, and turning her fixed and sterilised smile upon Reginald, who held himself at attention as if on parade, she poured forth a torrent of amiable nonsense to which he replied gravely, occasionally pausing for a moment's reflection.

Mme. Ploute thought him a charming young man, and all eyes were turned upon him as he described the uniform of the Sixteenth Rajput, known as the Lucknow Regiment, which consisted of a red tunic with white facings, and the white Wolseley helmet with a pugaree or muslin scarf twisted around the crown, or else of a khaki suit of knickerbockers, with puttees bound about the legs.

In imagination all pictured Reginald attired in this fashion, either in scarlet or buff, and looking extremely handsome. He was requested to give a few traits of manners peculiar to the Mishmi tribes among whom he had lived, and gradually the halo that belongs to a hero, a softened, tender glow, began to envelop him in the eyes of Mme. Pommeau, who was unhappily married, and of Mme. Ploute, who had once dreamed of being adored by some splendid warrior. Mme. Victor Limerel reflected gratefully that her dinner was going off well, while Reginald, finding that his French was easily understood, hesitated less and grew more animated.

"Paris must strike you drolly after the Mishmis," broke in the banker Ploute, who was a little bored by India.

"What have you seen in Paris during the week you have spent here?" inquired M. Limerel, and several women's voices chimed in: "Yes, yes, tell us what you have seen in Paris, Monsieur Breynolds."

"Other Mishmis," murmured Félicien under his breath.

All heads were now turned towards the Englishman, and the *maître d'hôtel* and his aides who were passing the salad regarded with disfavour this guest who obstructed the service.

"I?" returned Reginald quietly, "I have been questioning priests and directors of institutions in regard to the charities of Paris. I have visited one of the last religious communities which has been allowed to remain here, and the Training School for Cripples of the Brothers of St. Jean de Dieu. That seems to me a work surpassing human powers."

"You were not doing this for pleasure?" queried Mme. Ploute anxiously. "You doubtless have a mission from your government."

"No, I am not on any mission. I am doing it of my own accord."

"How curious! Don't you think, *chère amie*," said the handsome Mme. Ploute, addressing the pretty Mme. Pommeau, "that it is very odd? Monsieur Breynolds has not at all the air——"

"Of what, *ma chère*?"

"Why—of that!"

"Then," resumed M. Limerel, "you must be rewriting Maxime Du Camp's book for your own benefit."

"Precisely," said Reginald. "I have discovered that the charities of Paris are a world in themselves, and an admirable one."

"You must have—ah—excellent ones at home."

"Doubtless we have prosperous institutions, if you like, and yet there is a personal force here which strikes me greatly."

There was a chorus of approbation, followed by an immediate abandonment of the handsome Indian officer. The men smiled at their neighbours as if to say: "There, didn't I warn you?" The ladies, the younger ones especially, smiled back. "You were right, and yet he promised to be interesting. He started off well."

Mme. Limerel decided that there was no time to lose in getting off of charities and effecting some sort of digression.

Marie noticed that Félicien did not share the ironical attitude of M. Pommeau, M. de Semoville, the secretary, or his father.

Dinner over, as she was returning to the salon on Reginald's arm, M. Bourguillière, who had not uttered a word at table, approached them:

"Mr. Breynolds," he said, "allow me to tell you that the opinions you have expressed are precisely my own. There is no place in the world where the original human material is nobler than with us," and he bowed. Reginald was at once seized upon by the diplomat, who had been silently preparing a series of questions to propound to him, while Félicien joined Marie where she was standing relieved against a splendid background of Gobelins tapestry which draped one end of the salon.

"I cannot speak of myself," he began, "since I have promised, but I have the right to ask what this Englishman is doing here, who seems to know you and your mother so well. What has he come for? For you, perhaps?"

"No," she answered, "he has a much better object."

"To write a book? What stuff!"

"No, to seek the truth."

"You cannot arouse my sympathy in him. I distrust these researches, for I suspect a personal object."

"How hard you are upon me, and how unjust to him!"

"Never fear! I will undertake the education of your Hindoo. I will soon cool his enthusiasm by showing him what a reactionary salon is like."

"Why should you try to belittle us in his eyes, Félicien?"

But he was already gone, in response to a signal from his father, who was conducting the men into the smoking-room. On their return they found the salons already invaded by a swarm of evening guests whom an interminable line of automobiles had deposited at the door.

Obliged to welcome this throng, Félicien did not find himself free again until the concert was half over, when he sought out Reginald, whom he found standing in a doorway leading from the small blue salon into the larger one, gazing with folded arms and observant eyes at the half-circle of women, most of them young and in full ball dress, who were clustered around the piano,

while the men were drawn up in serried ranks behind them.

As Félicien approached, he sought to divine the thoughts of this Englishman, transported into a society so new to him, but failing to perceive the slightest change of expression cross his face, decided that Reginald Breynolds was a typical specimen of the phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon race.

In his morbid frame of mind this sight aroused his jealousy. Without being distinctly conscious of his own feelings, he experienced a vague dread of the comparison which might be drawn in a mind dear to him, between this stranger and himself, and he feared lest Reginald Breynolds should carry away from this party an image of Marie Limerel more bewitching than ever in the refined elegance of its setting. He therefore resolved to dissipate all illusions in regard at least to the setting. In order to reach Reginald's side, he was obliged to make a *détour* through the first salon, which was almost deserted, and while he was on his way the Englishman caught snatches of a *tête-à-tête* which was going on near him, to an accompaniment of the tuning of violins and 'cellos, between M. Pommeau, a black-headed young man with flashing white teeth, and a very young woman with the face of a Perugino angel and the figure of a Renaissance statue draped in rose-tinted satin. They were conversing in discreet undertones, as if used to such manœuvres, with their heads close together, but with their faces turned towards the orchestra as if intent on what was passing before them.

He: I should like to know what is going on in that little heart.

She: It is nothing so strange as you fancy.

He: The less reason for refusing to confess it to me.

She: A droll confessor.

He: Why so?

She: You would be too indulgent.

He: Towards myself, yes—but not towards others.

She: Naturally, but I prefer to keep my own secrets.

He: They are very naughty secrets, then?

She: You think me in need of repentance?

He: Repentance, no; you are too young for that.

She: Be still, Impertinent, some one might hear you.

He: What matter if they do?

She: Oh, there are principles here——

He: None to speak of, only fragments. Will you have some?

She: Not this evening, thank you.

And with this they drifted apart.

“Who is that lady?” Reginald asked of Félicien as he came up.

At that moment a rustic strain was being played on the 'cello, an artless little melody upon which, as it grew graver, the piano began to weave the *motif* of a prayer.

“She is a ‘flirt’ of Monsieur Pommeau’s, whose husband, a fine, agreeable, intelligent fellow, adores her. See! he is that tall, good-looking

man over there, who is watching her with anxious eyes. But they have very little money, and she likes Pommeau's presents, which proves the truth of Councillor Blumentel's epigram at dinner."

"Which one?"

"It's true, he indulged in several, but in such low tones that one half of the table could only see the other half laugh. Well, what he said was: 'Rarer than a love-marriage is a love-flirtation; they are mostly *de convenance*.'"

The Englishman saw nothing droll in this remark and did not even sketch a smile. The pastorage was over now and after a burst of applause the women hastened to resume the buzz of conversation so unfortunately interrupted by the music.

As the 'cellist, with his instrument in one hand and his bow in the other, stood bowing to Mme. Limerel, who was congratulating him, an old gentleman passed by muttering: "What a bore! was it not, Madame?"

"You see that bald young man, with a monocle, beside the piano?" pursued Félicien. "That is a very distinguished anarchist whom they are thinking of for a professorship at the College de France, or the Polytechnic. He can have his choice, of course. There are no claims nowadays that have a chance beside those of a demolisher. My father invited him because he is a power to be conciliated, perhaps on my account, certainly on his own."

"Ah, indeed!"

"I shall not offer to introduce you, because in your character of Englishman you will immedi-

ately be called upon to give in your adherence to the principle of universal brotherhood."

"Not really!"

"Certainly, Monsieur. You have no idea of the tyranny of these diploma'd fools. Whether you agree with a word he utters or not, he leaves you convinced of your admiring allegiance. But I can guess what your real opinions are on that question. When all the nations of Europe have agreed to be brothers, the last to hold out his hand in this universal grasp will be the Englishman."

This time Reginald smiled and said:

"Very true that, very true!"

"You see that lady of uncertain age, with an equine profile, in the front row—not so far along—there you are! She is a very great lady indeed who entertains so much and so graciously that she considers herself exempt from the obligation of ever returning visits."

"I see no harm in that if people keep on going to her."

"That elderly man beside her is quite ruined, but is clever enough to live in luxury on nothing a year, and is greatly admired by the ladies."

"Who is that young lady in black tulle who has been talking so long with those two men?"

"She must be begging for one of her charities."

"You are joking! I have been watching her for twenty minutes by the clock, while she smiled and argued, and cajoled."

"No, I assure you she is one of the women whom gossip spares. It is the Countess de Soret, who

has been a widow for ten years, and has continued to go into society in order to help on her good causes. She has never paraded her grief, but has been all virtue, sorrow, and brave endurance. No stranger could quite understand her. That is the Parisian type of saint, and is a very superior article, believe me, which cannot be produced elsewhere."

Reginald's polite gesture of doubt seemed to say: Let us admit it, as I do not wish to contradict you, though I do not, myself, believe in that type.

M. Victor Limerel, who was circulating among his guests with a smile which counteracted his formidable chin, caught sight of Reginald and his son: "Ah, here you are, Monsieur!" he exclaimed. "I suppose my son is naming some of our guests to you, and I hope you are beginning to feel at home among us."

"I am praising them all impartially," said Félicien, as his father pursued his way, and at the same moment he remarked that Reginald's glance was fixed on Marie. "In short," he exclaimed, with increased bitterness, "there is no bond of unity among these people except that of being in the same salon. You may look in vain for convictions of any kind. Most of them have given up having any because they found them troublesome. They have no fears for anything but their pleasures, and when those are threatened they call in the fire-brigade."

"You have one, then?" queried Reginald, with an ironical gleam in his eyes.

"Everything is convention here," Félicien went on. "Society is like Chinese lacquer, made up of successive coats of varnish concealing very poor wood. There is plenty of wit among these people, and skill in the minor arts—by which I mean finance, mechanics, politics, and literature—but no common sense, and their opinions are like reeds in the wind."

"They lack religious principle," said Reginald.

"There is little enough of that left, my dear sir."

"I beg your pardon, but I have met with it since I came to Paris," Reginald replied with quiet assurance.

At this moment most of the ladies rose, and there was a general movement in the direction of the supper-tables, which were set upon a raised platform, at one end of the long salon, where the musicians were usually stationed on the occasion of a ball. Marie was among the last to enter; she had with her a girl of her own age, smaller than herself but equally pretty except for the inner glow which irradiated Marie's face. She was evidently looking for some one. With the same simplicity as if it had been a small family gathering she was trying to find Félicien, and to reassure him with a glance which said:

"Take courage! Hope! Amidst this crowd of pleasure-seekers, I am thinking only of you, and of the ordeal I have imposed on you." He caught her eyes and understood her. At the same moment she noticed the man beside him and remembered that he, too, had confided his inmost thoughts to

her. His eyes also were fixed upon her and she changed colour; then the proud head, so gracefully poised on the slender throat, was lost in the throng, and as she vanished Reginald took advantage of the opportunity to take his leave.

"I hope to see you again," said Félicien. "We two are so utterly unlike that we may learn something from one another. Where are you staying? I shall drop in to call."

"At Power's Hotel," replied Reginald.

"Avenue d'Antin? That is odd!"

"Why so? I am not the first officer of my regiment who has put up there."

"No, of course not. Good-bye, we shall meet soon."

Reginald, having no inkling of Félicien's jealous suspicions, merely carried away the impression that he had to do with a very light-minded, ill-balanced young fellow.

As Félicien re-entered the salon the company were resuming their seats to listen to a troupe of Russian singers.

He began now to judge himself severely and to realise in a flash that in sneering at his father's guests he had yielded to a base impulse, inspired by an unworthy jealousy of Marie, and his distress of mind was heightened by this thought. When, at the close of the evening, Mme. Limerel and Marie withdrew, Félicien was not there to take leave of them. He feared to meet those pure, womanly eyes which so easily penetrate the turbid current of a man's mind.

III

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Reginald Breynolds's cab stopped before the door of a long, low building in the Grenelle quarter standing in the midst of factories and waste lots surrounded by high palings. He entered a deep garden at the rear of which stood two large houses connected by a glazed gallery.

A woman sat knitting beneath the lindens in this quiet spot, and the silence that reigned there told more plainly than guide-posts that it was well outside the Paris limits. This was the Calvary Asylum, where poor women suffering from incurable cancerous maladies are received, nursed, and tenderly cared for.

Reginald ascended the steps leading to the glazed gallery, with a sense of such invincible repugnance as caused him to stammer and half forget his French when a lady, dressed in mourning and wearing a black cap, advanced to meet him and inquired his errand.

While addressing this lady, who was one of the ward nurses, and offering her his letter of introduction, he experienced the sensation of drawing in with every breath the germs of the terrible disease floating in the atmosphere around him. But her replies to his questions affected him as

powerfully as these feelings of instinctive repulsion, though in a far different way.

She was a woman of about forty, whose bright face was beaming with goodness and moral health. She spoke well and concisely, like a Parisian, and one who has little time to waste on trifles, though ready to bestow it freely upon all who need her help.

Her maternal tenderness towards her patients could be divined in the very motions of her hands, which seemed to be listening as well as her upturned head, while she clasped and unclasped them compassionately. How small she looked beside Reginald's tall figure, and yet how calm she appeared in comparison with this man who found himself powerless to maintain that impassibility and self-control which had been the habit of a lifetime!

"How many patients have you?" he asked her.

"Three wards, each holding twenty-one beds."

"And are these beds always full?"

"Always. Death makes the only vacancies, and indeed we need more room; it is so hard to refuse any one."

"Are they all poor women whom you receive?"

"All working women of Paris, yes."

"And they pay nothing?"

"Nothing, Monsieur. We live upon the charity of Paris, which is very great."

"Then you—the nurses—are not remunerated?"

"No, on the contrary, Monsieur, we pay our own board. In order not to be a burden, you understand."

Reginald went on.

"Then you live here constantly? You pass your life amidst these surroundings?"

"Certainly," she answered. "There are several of us who live here always with our patients. But we have other ladies who come in from outside to aid us. All widows like ourselves."

"Yes, I understand. The greatest sorrow ministering to the greatest anguish. That is very noble. Will you allow me to see one of your wards?"

She glanced at her watch and said:

"It is nearly time for the nurses to make their rounds. But you can glance in for a few moments."

And preceding him, she rapidly led the way through the glazed gallery into a passage connected with the building on the left. Then, all at once, she slackened her steps, and as they approached the scene of suffering without respite, she paused and said:

"You can look through this glass door. Our friends from outside, the ladies who come to help us, have just gone in."

He saw two rows of very white beds, with a wide space of waxed floor between them. White curtains were drawn back and wound about the posts of each bed, and a small black crucifix was suspended at the foot. The outline of motionless forms was visible beneath the coverlets, and pale faces rested upon each pillow. No sound was audible, but floods of light poured in on all sides. A few women, clad in the nurse's uniform, were kneeling motionless beside the beds.

"They are praying?" murmured Reginald.

"Yes, they are praying that their care may be acceptable and their hands very tender."

"—And that their courage may not fail?"

"Yes, and for that, too," answered his guide; "you can look in once more. You will see that all the beds are turned to face the chapel, so that our sick may look through the glazed partition towards the altar. That is their chief consolation."

The kneeling women rose and bent over the sufferers. Reginald heard faint moans and saw hands holding lint and unrolling bandages. On a bed near him he saw an old woman whose profile was turned to the light, revealing the ravages of the terrible malady. The volunteer nurse who was ministering to her touched the poor, disfigured face with a tenderness, a pity, which seemed to draw her soul to her finger-tips—with the touch, timid but sure, of one who wills, who implores, and who loves.

As the pure youthful profile of the nurse bent close above the ravaged cheek of the sick woman, Reginald drew back with a start of surprise and horror.

"It is not possible!" he cried. "Who is that lady?"

"A lady from the great world—one of those of whom I told you."

"I recognise her; it is the Comtesse de Soret, is it not?"

"It is," assented his guide.

"A strange country!" he said to himself, as he

took his departure, his soul stirred to its depths. "Such deeds as these are the real foundations of Paris, which sustain the whole edifice. An incomprehensible country until we discover who are its perpetual redeemers. These sublime women! and so simple with it all! What is it that carries them to such victorious heights? Nothing exists alone. From what underlying power does this force proceed, surpassing mere human pity?" And he recalled the windows looking towards the altar, and saw again the eyes and hands of the Comtesse de Soret.

On the following Thursday he ordered dinner at half-past six, a proceeding which excited the mirth of the landlord, and the exasperation of the chef. But he pursued his way unmindful of the laughter and the grumbling which are the inevitable accompaniment of our daily doings.

At seven he proceeded to the nearest Metropolitan station on the Champs-Élysées, having received minute instructions as to changing cars at the Étoile station and again at the Place d'Italie, thence by tramway to Bicêtre. This was the sort of journey he liked, with no companion to whom he must talk. He watched the Paris houses gradually diminishing in height, and the suburbs stretching out interminably, with their big factories and waste spaces, the streets assuming a redder hue as tiles replaced slates; the huge warehouses stored with iron, coal, oil, and lumber, and interspersed with little gardens stuck like tiny green feathers between the brick walls, all recalling the suburbs of many another city.

Beyond the fortifications, fields appeared where the grass had air enough to live, and where the roadsides were bordered by lines of waggons, unharnessed or without wheels, forming nomad villages where thousands of human beings were encamped. The tramway carried him out still further to where these movable huts were replaced again by decent houses, inhabited by the poorer labourers and superannuated workmen. On alighting at the spot indicated in his directions, Reginald inquired of a stout, bare-headed matron whom he met, the way to the church.

"With that accent you must have come a long way," she said. "But as to the church, that is another matter. You are right upon it, across the road there."

Having crossed the road, Reginald found himself in front of a rough-cast stone wall, surmounted by a green trellis; on the right was a rusty iron door over which was the inscription, "*Église paroissiale*."

Several women were entering and Reginald, passing in with them, crossed a narrow courtyard on one side of which stood the Church of the Kremlin, a long brick building with a sheet-iron roof, resembling a bowling alley.

It was apparently a temporary structure, and one of the women whom he questioned replied: "Oh, yes, it was only opened in 1907. There was a smaller one here formerly, but for a long time we had no church. This is a poor quarter where people merely lodge, just perch for the night, you know, like a flock of sparrows, and are off to

work by daybreak. But we were glad enough to have a church of our own once more. They put their seals on the little one—the one we had before, ah, *ces cochons!*”

Reginald had already entered the hall decorated with stacks of tri-colored flags, when he heard a parting shot from the woman behind him: “They must be well scared to make them think of us poor people *ces cochons!*” And as she spoke she dipped her fingers in the holy water. Half-way across the church Reginald met a tall young priest, with deep-set black eyes which looked out from cavernous hollows like those of a death’s head, yet the eyes were alive and full of kindness.

Seeing that he was a stranger, the priest said to him: “They come in such crowds that you cannot stand here without taking some one’s place, but if you will come this way, Monsieur, I will show you where you can see very well.” And so saying he led him to a vacant space in the choir where stood a chair and a prie-dieu, doubtless the abbé’s own.

The building was now thronged, the women on the Gospel side and the men on the Epistle side, like human furrows—poor clods of the same suffering humanity, yet with souls full of good-will, waiting for the Sower to scatter the seed, ready to receive it and let it germinate within them. Reginald stood gazing down upon them from the slight elevation of the choir, whence he could see mothers with babies cradled in the nest formed by their arm and bosom, aged veterans wearing the triumphant moustaches of the Empire, pushing before them curly-headed, neatly clad urchins

of three or four, young workmen trooping in, gaunt and lean, and flinging themselves into a chair without kneeling, ignorant of the courtesies of the place. Children were huddled before the communion-rail, crying and whimpering as though in the nursery. Filling the choir sat a group of young men with musical instruments in their hands or on their knees. A missionary mounted the pulpit, whereupon the young abbé with the deep-set eyes, who was sitting beside Reginald, bent over him and said:

"That is the band from the Grand Montrouge which comes all the way over here to lend beauty to our services. See, they have hurried! It is a long distance, and they came the moment they could get away from the shops and factories." A half-dozen of the musicians had risen and suddenly a fanfare burst forth, spirited, true, and with a martial sound that thrilled the blood. When the flourish was over the Englishman remarked by way of applause:

"They have good lungs for Frenchmen!"

"Thank you, yes. We have a few such left," responded the abbé.

The missionary had begun his discourse; without any graces of oratory he explained simply and clearly to his ignorant auditors certain points of doctrine; and in addressing these toil-worn workmen, whose naturally quick wits were stimulated rather than shocked by the humour of the faubourgs, he did not disdain to mingle an occasional pleasantry with words that appealed to their hearts. From time to time another missionary

rose and offered some argument to be refuted by him. Reginald listened with attention, but gazed still more attentively, now at the audience, now at the priest who for weeks had been speaking daily to these groping souls who were drawn together by a mysterious attraction, like a flock of birds—linnets, blackbirds, sparrows, and tiny finches with outstretched bills—fluttering about the charmer who whistles to them through a folded ivy-leaf.

“The man of whatever social class,” pondered Reginald, “who gives up family life for the sake of ministering to these poor creatures must be an ardent and devoted soul, a sort of maiden-knight who has given himself wholly to the service of humanity. *He* is the real friend of the indifferent, often hostile faubourg. What self-sacrifice! He voluntarily becomes one of them, bringing to them the riches of his faith and seeking to make them sharers in his strength and hope——”

As he mused thus, Reginald became more deeply absorbed in studying the faces of these Paris workmen, and trying to understand them.

One tall young fellow, with dreamy eyes, especially attracted him. He felt, as he looked at him, as if he were becoming the friend of this unknown who seemed a stranger even to those about him, and who showed plainly by the doubt, astonishment, and emotion contending in his face that he was listening for the first time to words which reveal to the human soul its wretchedness and its nobility.

“Where do you come from, poor boy?” he thought. “He is at the age when the mere flut-

tering of a woman's skirt as she passes, makes the heart beat faster. All the life around him draws him away from the church, seizes him and holds him—how has he escaped to come here? He entered alone, he looked at no one as he took his seat between a half-tipsy vagabond, evidently one of the submerged, and that huge hulking fellow, a sort of good-natured animal, as ready to serve his Maker as the ox in the stall. But the lad! that passionate, ardent youth! what power is it that has moved him more strongly than pleasure? How beautiful is the emotion in his face! St. John, the disciple nearest to Christ's heart, had eyes like his—eyes which guided by love look deeply into the invisible."

The violins and cornets began to play again. "Is it still the Montrouge band?" he asked his guide. "Yes," replied the abbé.

"And who is that youth in the fourth row? I have been watching him a long time. He has grasped everything; he is half ill with emotion. One can see that he has depth of soul."

"Such feeling is far from uncommon among the youth of our faubourgs," replied the priest after glancing at the young man, and Reginald saw that his shadowy eyes were moist. "Yes, it is often so, but his pallor comes from hunger, too. That is ten o'clock striking now."

"And has he eaten nothing since noon?" Reginald asked.

"No. Many of them come here fasting. They have not had time to go home first, you see. They come directly from the workshops to the

church. I could easily point them out by their pale cheeks."

"What good work you are doing among them! This parish is new, is it not?"

"Yes, and the church is newer still. Thirteen have been opened since the separation. Look, your friend is leaving."

The pale young workingman had risen listlessly, and stretched his long arms. He had a smile on his lips as he gazed around on the crowd in which he was being swept along; and yet, surely his brow and his heart were still bathed in floods of divine love.

Calls, laughter, and good-nights were exchanged amid the throng of men and women who now congregated in the shadow of the doorway. The evening air refreshed the faces weary from prolonged attention, and all opened their lungs to breathe it in more fully.

"Look here, Leroux!" cried one, "aren't you famished? I have had no dinner yet."

"Neither have I."

"Come along with me. I have got some cherries."

"That's not enough."

"I've got some meat, too. Let us share it. We are old chums, you know. Where are you living now? I never see you any more."

"I live down this way," and the two drifted off together.

The night was already dark when Reginald found himself alone on the sidewalk, the tram-car making a solitary island of light in the sur-

rounding obscurity. Having alighted at the Étoile station, he started on foot for his hotel in the Avenue d'Antin.

His mind was filled with that diffused and irradiating glow left within us by great thoughts and inspiring spectacles. The beauty of the night scenery of Paris, which he knew so well, appeared to him as something new. He enjoyed the sensation of being alone amidst the throng of vehicles and foot-passengers, with the emotions of the last few hours still possessing him.

He felt thankful that he had come to this city, and he found himself replying in spirit to the arguments and sarcasms he had so often listened to among his comrades, both in London and in India, upon the corrupting influences of Paris. "But you have not seen everything," he was saying. "There is a higher life already existing in this life, and those who are not privileged to see it judge the world incompletely."

The joy of youth surged through his veins as though he were drinking mountain-air, while the exercise of walking made his blood tingle after the stifling atmosphere of the cars and the crowded church.

He left the Champs Élysées behind him reluctantly, but as he turned into the Avenue d'Antin he chose the left-hand sidewalk, so that on looking up he could see the lighted windows of a certain third-floor apartment. He paused beneath them. Behind one of these windows a young girl was still awake, the only French girl he had ever really

known. Was she not more than that to him? Yes, she was the one woman to whom in an hour of deep mental distress he had confided his inmost thoughts and feelings.

She had never recalled, in the remotest way, their interview in the woods of Redhall; she had shown herself worthy of the confidence he had reposed in her. A feeling of tenderness, very pure and warm, filled his heart. It was but for a moment and he instantly reproached himself for allowing such thoughts to interfere with the purpose upon which his whole soul was now concentrated. His respect for the aim he had set himself and his instincts as a man of action alike prompted him to keep to the path upon which he had entered. He passed his hand across his brow, as if to dispel such sweet dreams. A sentence from the Psalms crossed his memory, for he had been brought up in close familiarity with the Scriptures: "Confirm a right spirit within me." Yes, that was what he needed; to be confirmed in the right spirit—the royal spirit. And he turned his thoughts once more to the sight he had witnessed that evening in the poor church of the Kremlin.

On the following Saturday, the twenty-sixth of June, Félicien Limerel was returning by the Champs Elysées from a visit to one of his diplomatic chiefs, who lived near the Bois de Boulogne. His reception had been a flattering one; the conversation had turned chiefly upon the subject of his future, and had been filled with those amiable predictions which do not

commit the prophet to any special efforts for bringing them to pass.

"You are the first among a brilliant set of candidates," his chief had remarked. "The minister to whom I was speaking this morning of your success said—this is strictly between us, you understand—'A name without a flaw and the manners of a gentleman. That is what we need in a democracy. The old *noblesse* are valuable to us, no doubt, but are not to be relied on, as they do not owe everything to us. This young man has impressed me most favourably.'"

Sugared words, such as had served for many others! But Félicien was still young and he relished them.

Shortly after leaving the house, however, his thoughts turned into other channels and echoed other words, whose power far surpassed that of these idle flatteries. Pangs of the heart trembling for its threatened love came first, but more torturing still was the self-questioning that followed:

"Ought I to condemn myself?—to decree my own ruin?—and doubly, too, since in renouncing Marie I renounce at the same time the faith of my fathers? Marie put me on my honour and I gave her my promise. But what cruelty! To force me to a self-examination before which, after all, most men, older and wiser than myself, would recoil. How many live on without ever drawing up the account of their moral defeats or their religious backslidings! How many never think of these things till they are on their death-beds, and

some not even then! Why must I weigh myself before the hour and confess that I am found wanting? And if I condemn myself I shall meet with no pardon. Marie trusts to my sincerity—and that is the worst of all. Not to be able to deceive! Not to know how! No, Marie, I will not lie to you. But why has this question arisen so imperiously between us? It is since her return from London and the arrival of this Englishman. What does he want here? I suspect him of being in love with her, too. Ah, if I find him guilty of that trick! Of playing the bigot and feigning piety in order to ingratiate himself with Marie and my aunt! What do they know about him, after all? He and I are being silently compared, I am sure of it. If he is not an actual rival, he is the ideal hero, the model that I am far from being. He is beginning to irritate me, that fellow, and he appears to have no suspicion of it. But I can soon show him. I have promised to call." And as the young man turned into the Rue La Boétie he said to himself: "I can easily find out what he has in his mind and what he wants." And he entered the Hotel Powers. The clerk telephoned and received the answer that M. Limerel might go up at once. As he entered the little salon, Reginald came forward to meet his guest with extended hand and no appearance of surprise.

"I must beg you to excuse the disorder of my rooms," he said, "as my man has not had time to finish packing." And in fact a pile of garments, neatly folded, was lying on a sofa.

The young men entered into conversation at once, but Reginald, remembering the Limerel dinner and the sarcastic reception accorded to his account of his excursions among the charitable institutions of Paris, replied to Félicien's questions with a studied reserve which would have seemed scarcely civil if it had not been tempered by look and manner.

At last Félicien asked impatiently:

"By the way, you saw my aunt yesterday?"

"No."

"Oh! The day before, then?"

"No. She is well, I hope. You have had no bad news from her?"

"None whatever," replied Félicien, with rising irritation. "And if there had been, you, being so near a neighbour, would doubtless have heard it first."

"Not unless the messenger mistook his way," replied the Englishman calmly.

The directness and sincerity of his tone checked Félicien, who began to realise that if this man had a secret he would certainly not allow it to be drawn from him by sarcasms and light skirmishing.

"Well," he remarked, changing his tactics with the pliancy which was one of the charms as well as dangers of his temperament, "I imagine that you have brought your charitable investigations to an end."

"Not at all," returned Reginald.

"What! Not yet? It must be a wager then. At your age, to pass a fortnight in Paris visiting nothing but churches and hospitals!"

"Pardon me, but if I find more that appeals to me and stirs my mind in such sights than in museums and theatres, why not? We are not all obliged to look at things in the same way. At this moment these essential and vital subjects occupy me exclusively. You are probably uninterested in religious speculations."

"You are mistaken."

The Englishman made a deprecating gesture as if to say: "I do not insist. I should be sorry to go too far. I merely meant to express a possible difference between us," and resumed with a new accent of courteous interest:

"I am preparing to go to Montmartre this evening, to spend the night in the Basilica."

"Can that be done?" asked Félicien.

A smile from across the Channel, a barely perceptible movement at the corners of the smooth-shaven lips which would not have been noticed beneath a Frenchman's moustache, betrayed Reginald's surprise, but he made no rejoinder. Félicien, however, asked for no explanation; his expression suddenly changed, and under the sway of some influence which his interlocutor could not divine, his irritation vanished for the time, as he asked earnestly:

"Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"To Montmartre? Certainly. You can be my guide there if you will. On our arrival I shall find a person awaiting me to whom I have brought a letter of introduction."

"I shall not be in your way, then?"

"Not in the least."

Félicien added in a lower tone, as though speaking to himself:

"It is strange enough. You are going out there in search of a faith: I to find out if I still possess one."

The Englishman inclined his head, inwardly moved by this sort of moral resemblance, and struck by the sudden gravity of Félicien's tone. They did not pursue the subject further, but both understood that this night's experience was to have a decisive influence over their destiny. For the next few hours they were to be united, in spite of the dissimilarity of their natures, by a like noble impulse, a religious inspiration, and this was a motive for mutual esteem.

But Reginald abandoned himself far more readily than Félicien to this influence, being free from all jealousy, and his yearning after truth unmixed with personal motives.

Félicien's mental suffering had other less exalted causes, and was due not so much to his loss of faith as to the possible consequences of avowing it. The motives guiding his actions left him a prey to perplexity without aspiration, sufficient only to lead him for a few hours into the company of the saints where silent miracles of grace might be looked for. Both men were trying a spiritual experiment, but only one was seeking the light for its own sake.

"It is agreed then," said the Englishman; "at a quarter after eight you will find me in the salon downstairs, and we will take a carriage at once."

"My father would laugh at me if I told him where I am about to spend the night. He would not believe me—and it does, in fact, seem incredible—so I cannot ask him to lend me his car, though I often borrow it on less worthy pretexts. This evening, then."

Félicien had another reason for not communicating his plan to his father. M. Limerel, being accustomed as a man of business to read men's minds and detect their motives of self-interest, would have suspected at the first word the connection between Montmartre and Marie Limerel, and have felt convinced that Reginald never would have gone there except for her sake, and probably at her instigation.

About nine o'clock, accordingly, the two young men reached the foot of the stairs which ascend the hill of Montmartre. It had been raining, and a cold wind, the final gust of a retreating storm, drove the clouds in tattered shreds towards the south, while the white domes of the Basilica soared into the pure azure above.

Before entering at the little door which opened in the midst of scaffoldings, they both turned to look back for a moment. Paris spread below them like a rose-tinted plain, barred across its whole extent by a scarf of soft mists, the farther end of which rested upon the slopes of Belleville and Ménilmontant. And above this bank of fog and smoke the sky was swept clear, a spotless pathway for the young moon. On the heights the last gleam of day was slowly fading, while below, in that valley of hewn stones, lines of

twinkling lights traced to the limits of the horizon a prodigious network of streets and avenues.

On entering the precincts of the church, the young men found a man awaiting them, who had evidently been notified of the Englishman's visit.

"I regret, gentlemen," he said, "that there is no one to present me to you. I am Louis Proudon, president of the society of Les Pauvres de Montmartre."

"He is evidently a gentleman," thought Reginald, as he gazed at him attentively for a moment. He was a man of medium height, thin, and stooping slightly, whose delicate, bearded face, somewhat severe in outline, was lighted up by the smile of one who voluntarily submits his will to that of others—the gentleness of the strong.

"I will guide you over the Basilica," he said. "We will first attend the Adoration of the Poor, then I will take you to the chapel where the general service of adoration takes place. Whenever you desire it you can go to the rooms reserved for you and rest. You are young for a night of vigil. One has to get used to it. You have never been here before?"

"I have not, since the evening of my baccalaureate," replied Félicien. "And you, Monsieur, do you not sleep at all during the night?"

The President of the Poor smiled. "Oh, no," he replied. "It is necessary, you see, to have some one awake whenever the hour strikes, to summon each new party to take their turn in the service. It is a little hard at first, but one gets used to it, I assure you."

He spoke simply, as he led his guests into the dormitory, where several poor, dejected looking men were seated, like soldiers, on the edge of their camp-beds, awaiting the bowl of soup which was soon brought to them, with a slice of white bread and a glass of red wine. Félicien was inclined to prolong this visit which distracted his mind from what was to follow. But Reginald, who had not the same apprehensions in regard to the silent vigil in the church, hastened on. Happily the ordeal did not begin at once.

Between the building they were now visiting and the church itself stretched a sort of postern path, damp and grass-grown, lined on each side by the enormous piers which support the edifice, and open to the sky overhead. Here Reginald said, with a slight laugh, "Pardon me, but this will be our last chance to smoke a cigarette," and drawing from his pocket a silver case stamped with the arms of Oxford, he offered it to each of his companions in turn, and the smoke of three cigarettes soon mingled with the night air.

At a little past nine, standing side by side in the crypt, and leaning against the same pillar, Reginald and Félicien were gazing upon a spectacle equally new to them both. Reginald was farther forward in the half-light, and Félicien behind him in the shadow close by the stairway leading from the subterranean church to the upper nave. They were motionless, and scarcely visible on the outskirts of the brightly lighted space before the altar, encircled by low, heavy pillars. In this luminous half-circle some forty

men were kneeling. Their leader, the fraternal Louis Proudon, standing close to the altar-rail, was reading the evening prayers aloud to them from a small book which he held in his hand, and all at once they began uttering the responses in rude, hoarse voices, strangely unlike his—the voice of the mob which shouts, sings, curses, threatens, and which was now praying.

Then the men sang a hymn together, and kneeling or seated, joined in worship with unspoken words which they could not have originated, but must have revived from far-off memories, or received from Him to whom they now looked up. What power had they to make prayers for themselves? What did they know beyond their poverty and the needs of a heart that could still love?

They were rapt and attentive as those who await the passing of a bridal procession beneath the porch. Their eyelids were but partly raised, on account of the dazzling light and their weariness.

Reginald and Félicien examined these countenances which showed little change of expression, except where some moving thought or memory rose clearly from the depths of their obscure souls. As they gazed, our young men understood more clearly that these were not only the genuinely poor, but the utterly wretched, those who excite fear rather than pity, vagabonds with rough beards torn by battling with the winds and worn by the stones which had served as their pillow, clothed in miserable rags, some with coarse mufflers wound about their necks in spite of the heat, because they were wearing all the clothing

they owned. Doubtless the thieves of Calvary were here; but chiefly the outcast, those destitute of bread, of shelter, without families and without hope, were watching at the feet of the Master whom they had found.

Many of those sad eyes—the eyes of the despised, in which hate takes up its dwelling—were raised now and softened for a brief moment; then the rusty door of their souls closed again.

Behind the two young men, the President of the Poor had drawn near, and now murmured in a scarcely audible voice but with a note of tenderness:

“You see that man who is standing on the edge of the circle, the dark, bald man, with a little colour in his cheeks—he is almost rich now. He has often slept under the bridges and fed on the leavings from the restaurants, but at present he is a sort of aristocrat, having a small public employment. He makes a living by gluing, directing, and stamping ‘newspaper wrappers—an exceptional thing here. But he is good, he does not forget us, and since he gave up begging he has never failed to come here to pass every Saturday night with his old street companions.”

Some of the men were yawning now, without disguise, and others were falling asleep. There were wistful gleams here and there from beneath the heavy eyelids.

Proudon resumed: “Those two with hollow cheeks, side by side in the middle, look! one of them has just dropped off, and it is only right that he should, poor fellow! You would not

believe what excellent men they are. They are glass-blowers who work all night keeping up the fires. Their only free night is Saturday, and they spend it here. The older one came first and said to the other on Sunday when he went back to work: 'I have never rested so well as last night, and yet I only slept by snatches in a chair. I will take you along with me next Saturday.'"

As he spoke, Louis Proudon was already ascending the steps leading from the crypt into the choir of the Basilica. The immense nave was in shadow as he led them in the direction where all the life of the place was centred—the chapel of the Blessed Virgin behind the high altar, where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. He left them at the entrance, saying:

"Your rooms are ready and you can go to them when you like. You may depend upon me to call you in the morning."

Félicien was standing nearest to the aisle, with Reginald directly behind him, while before them was gathered a throng of between two and three hundred men. They were not singing, but standing silently, all these human souls, absorbed in the contemplation of one object, to which the attention of the new-comers was drawn as imperiously by the force of their united thought as rays of light are attracted towards their eternal source.

This mysterious force which emanates from a deeply absorbed multitude sweeps all before it like a mighty wind, thrilling the soul as it is borne along. Félicien had less need than Reginald of being swept away on this irresistible current.

Early memories, mingled emotions of defiance and regret, drew his eyes towards the monstrance and the Host within.

He fixed his long unaccustomed gaze upon it, asking nothing, simply yielding himself to the old experience; and as he did so, he acquired the conviction that nothing stirred within him. He was grieved to find himself so unmoved except by the one thought:

"Must I own to Marie that I cannot pray? That I cannot weep except for her or, rather, for myself? Must I tell her this? The very saints themselves have had their moments of spiritual lethargy."

He turned his eyes away, but thoughts no less cruel assailed him. "I was not always like this; a spring has dried up within me. Words once full of meaning are empty now. I feel by the coldness of my heart that all fraternity is dissolved between me and those who worship; I am no longer one of them. To-night is not the first time that I have been conscious of this change, but what overpowering evidence at last!"

He yearned to find that he was not the only indifferent one, and his eyes turned from one to another of the men on their knees around him. All were praying. There was one close beside him whose lips did not move, but whose eyes were raised to the altar and who never stirred. As Félicien watched him, a mist seemed to pass across his eyes like a cloud of incense, then they resumed their limpid, deeply rapt gaze. Félicien stole a glance at Reginald, who was standing mo-

tionless with folded arms, and who, on his side, was saying to himself:

"These men belong to all classes except the very poorest. They come here without ambition or any hope of human reward, and yet they receive a compensation for the physical repose they sacrifice. Their souls find a support which is revealed in their faces. They have found peace—something at least of that peace which we all pursue, and which flees before us. It is *here*, for them at least.

"Yes, they are sincere. Every night men are watching and praying on the mountain above Paris; perhaps mysteriously protecting the city. What a contrast to all the corruption below! Such contrasts were absent from the old civilizations."

And he thought of all he had read of the corruptions of Babylon, the insolence, the lust, the cruel barbarity which held such countless women, rich and poor, in bondage, for whom there was no true life, only a blighted spring without maturity and an unendurable old age. He thought again:

"Can it be possible that through the prayers of these worshippers other men may be redeemed—their kindred, their friends, their enemies even? Are they like clouds carrying their grateful moisture to the ends of the earth? What a noble idea of power! What a dominion wider than all earthly kingdoms!"

At this moment Félicien bent forward and spoke to him:

"I am going. Will you come, too?"

"Not yet."

"We will meet, then, at daybreak."

"Very well."

Félicien lingered a moment, thinking that Reginald might decide to follow him; then he passed out of the church, and his retreating step echoed along the flag-stones outside.

Reginald's meditation continued: "They do not doubt that they are in the presence of the Christ transfigured by love—of a divine presence mingling with the throng, close to all human misery. That would indeed be the supreme consolation; humanity calls for such a presence. It is lacking to such as we—a wider chasm separates us from him than from these worshippers. Perhaps they see him in vision, these men with the rapt faces! Why these temples, if we cannot hold God within them? There where Christ is nearest, truth must be. To have Christ within us—not merely grace, but life!"

Words from the gospel come back to his memory, from the old Bible whose binding had been worn by generations of his family, seeking to comprehend what is meant for all. Memories of Redhall assailed him. How they wounded the heart which yet did not try to turn away from them! The forest, the pond, the ivy-covered walls, the rhododendrons in bloom, the old castle, the faces above all, passed before the young man as he stood so long upright and motionless like one on guard before his king on some grand levee day. The images were so clear, the words interchanged before his departure retained so distinctly their very

tone and sequence, that a great grief overpowered him.

He was alone at night, in a church in France, where none of the beings dearest to him could follow him in thought, lost, forgotten, the only stranger perhaps, certainly the only heretic, in that throng. Why, he asked himself, did he remain there? and he would have been unable to give a satisfying answer.

He gazed insistently on the Host amidst its golden rays—a sort of spell kept his eyes fixed upon it. A secret and gentle will which he felt to be perfectly reasonable, controlled him and kept his heart and spirit open, like casements to the air of spring.

Reginald experienced anew, amidst these Catholic surroundings, the child's first consciousness that he has a soul which he raises with reverence to God, such a feeling as he had experienced in his early childhood when his father was reading the Book aloud at evening in the chapel at Red-hall. But there mingled with it a new thrill of emotion, an impulse towards something higher, a splendid inspiration.

He thought: "This is the overthrow of rebellious reason, but the triumph of the loftiest wisdom and love. What if He were here present, impossible to recognize until He spoke, as in the garden of the sepulchre He appeared to Mary Magdalen, who, supposing Him to be the gardener, cried: 'Have you seen Him?' She saw Him and yet sought Him still. Oh, to ask from Him strength, life, the way!"

He was not weary of standing, yet his knees bent and he remained for a time kneeling, without turning his eyes from the Host before which his doubt prayed as did the faith of those others.

He rose at last. His companions had paid no attention to his movements. Other men came up as the clock struck, to take their hour of watching. He left his place without another glance, agitated by happy emotions, and sought the chamber reserved for him in one of the buildings adjoining the Basilica. His bed was too short and hard for sleep to come at once. He had supposed that at this height above Paris he should hear the intermittent roar of the city like the murmur of the sea, and this fancy had not been without its influence on his resolve to spend a night at Montmartre.

But he was disappointed. Instead of a sound like the rise and fall of the tide, absolute silence reigned, broken only by the shriek of locomotives from the Gare du Nord. Benumbed by fatigue, Reginald fancied himself on a sailing-vessel, perched aloft in the rigging, hearing orders shouted back and forth on the decks below. At times a deep thunderous sound rose from the depths of the ocean, without his being able to divine where the monstrous surge would break. And that other cry, far off, despairing, was it not the signal of a vessel in distress? Then all tumult died away; the vision of the sea faded into deep slumber. The wind subsided as it had risen, and Montmartre, with the millions, waking or sleeping, around it, was as silent as the tomb.

Reginald was sleeping profoundly when M. Louis Proudon knocked at his door, crying:

"It is a quarter after three, Monsieur the Englishman whose name I cannot recall! It is time to rise."

Shortly afterwards the three men were ascending the flight of stone steps leading to the roof of the Basilica, Félicien having joined them. He was pale, and the flashing eyes which lent such animation to his countenance were veiled by fatigue, or some other cause.

"A glorious morning," exclaimed Reginald, pointing to the horizon.

"A glacial morning," responded Félicien, "and if it is the same to you, we will not linger here long."

"Very well; as you please."

Félicien shook the hand which the Englishman held out to him, but with so little cordiality that the latter noticed it, filled as his mind was with thronging impressions; but he merely said to himself: "It is the loss of sleep; his ill-humour will soon pass." And deciding that Frenchmen had very little endurance, he pursued his way along the gutters at the edge of the tiled roof. Their guide next preceded them up an inner stairway leading to the gallery which surrounds the central dome above the great stained-glass windows. Reginald, emerging first, called back: "M. Limerel, come quickly! It is splendid, really splendid!"

Slowly he began to make the tour of that lofty *chemin de ronde*, suspended in mid-air, and paused to look out at each opening in the parapet.

"It is indeed a rare morning," murmured Reginald. "All Paris is visible as London never is. Yes, the city is not so vast that one cannot see the country beyond. What is that to the north?"

"The plain beyond St. Denis," replied M. Proudon, "and those dark streaks far away to the left are the forest of St. Germain."

"It is the last moment of the morning twilight," resumed Reginald. "See! Paris has no artificial lights now except at the railway stations, where the signals are still burning. The city is khaki-colour; it is like an immense flat ant-heap, or an open stretch of ploughed land, sprinkled with tiny pebbles which are buildings and green leaves which are gardens. And what a sky above it!" Long streamers of transparent mist floated above the houses, partly dissolving in the breeze from the west, but in the east they united to form a heavy bank of violet fog which rested over Belleville. There the summit of the fog-bank turned to rose-colour at the spot where the sun was about to pierce it, then to blood-red. Elsewhere the sky was swept clear by a keen wind, and close to them rose an aerial island, milky-white, formed by the roofs with their lace-like pinnacles, and the domes crowned with slender spires, of the Basilica itself.

"We are above the zone of blackening smoke," said Reginald, who was leaning over the parapet, not far from Félicien. "How transparently white this stone is. The church seems built of alabaster. It is blessing Paris in the splendour of the daybreak. Ah, there is the sun!"

"The sun," said Félicien. "Well, why do you greet it like that?"

Reginald did not hear, absorbed in the spectacle before him. The edges of the canopy rolled up by the mist were turned to a vast pomegranate flower, then to a marigold, and now, magnificent and dazzling as it was, it had become as nothing, for above it rose the full orb of day. A moment, and it was completely free. A few of the loftier edifices below them caught the light, while the houses were still wrapt in shadow; close at hand the summit of one of the smaller domes seemed to blossom like a tuft of stone, then turn to flame.

"You speak like a worshipper," said Félicien. "You are growing lyrical."

His voice was harsher than its wont, and betrayed suffering. He had risen and was leaning against one side of a pillared opening in the parapet, while Reginald stood on the opposite side. His cheek was pale, even in the flush of dawn, and his face was set and sad.

"You are becoming a Catholic!" he exclaimed suddenly.

Reginald, who had made no reply to the first attack, now responded quickly:

"I cannot let you assert what is not the fact. I have been deeply moved, it is true. Such a morning following such a night! But the other thing is not true. Should you not be glad for me, however, if it were?"

"Frankly, no."

"You surprise me!"

"It is possible that I may surprise you, but it is best that we should understand each other, and indeed I wish it."

Félicien's tone had grown so vehement that Reginald slowly turned to face him. In that narrow space, that cell of light into which the two men had mounted to watch the sun rise over Paris, they now fronted each other like adversaries, Félicien resolved on demanding an explanation, Reginald taken by surprise and torn abruptly from his mood of enthusiasm.

"Yes, I wish you to know the depths of my heart. You need not protest. I tell you that I wish it. It is not perhaps so noble as yours, nor so pure and sublime, and it is certainly less happy, but it will interest you nevertheless. You must know then that I have been wrestling all night with the same problem which apparently confronts you."

"Not apparently but actually," said Reginald.

"Well, for me no hope has dawned, no new strength has come to my aid. On the contrary, my doubts have increased. I have retraced the course of my life with startling lucidity, and have found myself much farther removed from my devout youth than I had thought."

"I am sorry for you, Monsieur."

"You ought to rejoice."

"How could I, when I see you suffering?"

"Yes, but you also see me conquered already. You may conclude that the advantage is with you. I know your secret, and from the first day we met I have seen through your schemes."

"My schemes!"

"Your attentions to my cousin and your pious excursions over the city. These are closely related terms, are they not?"

He drew nearer as he spoke, and bent forward. The muscles of his jaw and the veins in his forehead and temples stood out beneath the skin, heightening the look of anger in his face as he cried: "You must be in haste to descend and to be alone with your happiness. You are waited for. As soon as it is broad daylight you will hasten to my aunt Limerel's to give an account of your night-watch. And you know how it will be received. Do not deny it! Yours is the devotion pleasing to my cousin Marie."

Reginald had scarcely stirred, even when Félicien touched him with his quivering fingertips. Standing very upright, with his back to the wall and his face impassible, he had merely raised his clenched hands towards his breast in case he should be attacked. After the last words had died away in silence, he replied deliberately:

"You are inventing all this."

"That is easy to say; prove it!"

"The proof is equally easy. I shall not see Mme. Limerel, because I am leaving Paris this morning."

"What do you say?"

"I say that I am leaving Paris this morning by the eleven thirty-nine train."

Félicien gazed fixedly for a moment at the man who thus briefly spurned any implication of treachery. He divined—he felt convinced—that this

rival who had crossed his path was an absolutely loyal nature whom he had insulted with his unjust suspicions. He turned pale and his eyes filled as he held out his hand, saying:

"Pardon me. I have misjudged you. I am bitterly unhappy."

Then, not wishing to break down utterly and fearing that further words would betray his emotion he turned back to the opening through which the morning light streamed in. Reginald did likewise, and both remained silent, the rays of the sun forming an impalpable barrier between them. Louis Proudon, leaning on the balustrade at a little distance off, had not heard their colloquy, or at least had not understood it. His thoughts were absorbed in his poor who would soon be coming from the slums and the outskirts of Paris for the eight o'clock mass and distribution of bread: "I shall not have enough for a fine day like this," he was saying to himself, "only two thousand pounds of bread. The sunshine brings them all out; they will gather as thick as ants." And he rejoiced within himself as he pictured the flight of steps to the eastward black with the ascending throng.

The silence of the white dome, the breath of wind which swept by without bringing any murmur of voices to his ear, aroused him from his dream.

"Come this way, gentlemen, and let me show you the forest of St. Germain. It looks from here like a blue ribbon. You are in luck to have been here this morning!"

The young men followed him, but as they

showed little interest in his explanations and asked no questions, he very soon conducted them down the spiral staircase to the roofs and then into the church, where he left them.

A few moments later Félicien and Reginald stopped on the esplanade where the funicular descends. They had not spoken a word to each other since their violent altercation above. Reginald paused for one more look over Paris with the morning light upon it. Félicien stood a little apart; he had recovered his self-possession, and his delicate face and fine head, as he bent forward, with his eyes fixed upon the far-off city, gave him the aspect of a melancholy poet composing a stanza. His lips moved as if rehearsing the words he was about to utter, and at last he spoke, without turning his eyes from the scene before him, and with such genuine grief in his tones that Reginald started:

“So many men mingle human interests with their search after truth. You do not. I congratulate you. Believe me, since we are about to separate, you ought to see Marie again.”

“But since——”

“Yes, I assure you— Not this morning—to-night you had better call on her. This morning there will be a great change in her life, as in mine. Oh! you are too proud. I see! I understand and I was merely testing you. I owe her the truth and I have promised to tell her everything, that is all. It is a terrible thing, Monsieur, to love a woman with a despairing love like mine. Well, let us say good-bye.”

They shook hands hastily, and Reginald replied: "I wish you happiness. Yes, very honestly."

Then each went his own way, and finding a couple of stray cabs they were soon back in the heart of Paris.

At eight in the morning Félicien rang the bell of his aunt's house, and the concierge having assured him that the ladies had gone to early mass and would soon be at home, he went upstairs to await them in the vestibule. The maid begged him to enter, but he declined, saying:

"No, I have only a message to give and am going on. I will wait here."

The truth was that he could not bear to enter the salon where Marie's portrait hung, nor did he wish to have her in sight a moment after the words he had to say were uttered. He felt already spent and exhausted.

As he stood there, he heard approaching footsteps and calm voices on the stairs; the key turned in the door and Mme. Limerel entered, followed by Marie.

They both spoke at once, but in different tones.

"Is that you, Felicien? so early!" exclaimed Mme. Limerel, while Marie said:

"Ah! you are here. I understand. Come quickly."

She drew him in the half-light, threw back her veil, and on seeing Félicien's face recoiled, crying: "No, no, do not come!" and escaped to the salon, repeating, "No, not to-day. I cannot bear it."

As Félicien followed her to the door of the salon she reiterated:

"I do not want you to speak so soon! Mamma, do not let him speak," and she retreated to the farthest window, with her face buried in her hands.

Mme. Limerel, standing before Félicien, tried to hold him back, saying: "Do as she begs, Félicien. Not to-day."

"I must," was all he answered.

"To-morrow, if you like, my dear boy. Wait till to-morrow."

"No, to-morrow I should not have the strength."

"You have not taken time enough. You do not know what you will say to her."

"Alas! I do indeed. I shall tell her that no one will ever love her as I do, since I can give her up and acknowledge that I am not worthy of her."

"You will give her too much pain."

"The harm is done, since she has seen me. Let me go to her."

Mme. Limerel had closed the door at the moment Félicien tried to enter; she now held it closed while her nephew stood before her, his face hollowed and drawn by a suffering more cruel than physical pain; but on this grief-stamped face, the will was still dominant. The mother saw that his resolution was final, and that to oppose him further was merely to struggle against fate which had set its imprint on Félicien's countenance. She drew back saying, "Go to her then, my poor boy!"

He entered the room and approached Marie

where she stood by the window. He appeared like one breathless from running as he leaned back against the crimson hangings. Her hands were still pressed across her eyes, and between the parted wrists her lips could be seen to move. Was she praying or was she still repeating in tones of exhaustion, "Not to-day: I cannot bear it."

He was now close beside her, but the wretchedness of each sought a brief respite, the courage of each strove to gather strength for further suffering. Félicien, at last, spoke very low:

"Marie, I am not worthy to love you as you wish to be loved. I no longer believe."

She took her hands from her eyes slowly; she was as white as he, and her lids were half closed.

"What proof have you? I implore you not to deceive yourself," she said.

He replied hurriedly, nervously:

"I have reflected for a week, and last night I watched all night, searching my very soul before the Blessed Sacrament, which was once as holy to me as to you."

"Oh, be silent!" she cried. "Say no more."

"Marie, I can pray only to you. I no longer believe."

And they looked into each other's eyes, searching each other's souls. He saw her grief; he saw, also, the gulf between them. He saw the living faith, the virgin soul, which answered, No.

Then suddenly turning away, he hastened from the room and out of the house, while Mme. Limerel entered and threw her arms around her daughter,

who clung to her weeping and repeating between her sobs: "Oh, mamma! it is terrible. It is too cruel! Have I asked too much of him? Tell me if I have not asked too much!"

M. Victor Limerel had just risen and was seated at his writing-table in his morning costume, consisting of a grey dressing-gown bordered with red. The letters which he had already opened, having been carefully classified, were lying in four piles of unequal height, pending the arrival of one of the secretaries of the Société Française. He was glancing at one of the newspapers which had been brought him with his early mail, when Félicien entered the room.

"Well, my dear boy, is that you? Where are you from?"

"That is what I came to tell you."

"Ah! I know—from Montmartre—your mother told me last evening. It is not a bad place, but you must admit that to spend the whole night out there, away from your home, without any reason— Pray explain yourself."

"I had two reasons," Félicien replied, "which are in fact but one. I went there to consider a project of marriage."

His father, who up to this moment had continued, while talking, to glance at the news, laid his paper aside and looked up at Félicien, whose aspect was cold and decided and who looked fully master of himself.

"A project?" he inquired. "Which do you mean? The one——?"

"Yes, precisely, with my cousin Marie."

"You know my decision. That marriage cannot take place."

"It will not take place, father, because I have given it up."

"Ah! so much the better. So much the better. So you are becoming reasonable."

"No, I am becoming desperate, father, and I have resolved to speak out."

His father was pleased, in spite of himself, to recognise his own decision of attitude and frankness of speech in his son.

"Of course it is natural that you should regret it, my son," he said. "I have never understood your fancy, and have opposed it. But so far as sentiments go, you are free."

"You are right. I have just come from declaring to my cousin that I shall love her always, but that I cannot marry her."

"*Parbleu!* It was not she who refused you, then? It would, in fact, have been great luck for her."

"I realised that I was unworthy of her."

"What is that you are saying?"

"Yes, unworthy of her. I have been examining myself for the past week and that is the conclusion I have reached to-night. Unworthy, because she has made up her mind to marry only a believer, and I am no longer one."

"What do you expect me to do about it?"

"You can do nothing now, but it is you who are responsible."

"What nonsense! I can make allowance for your unhappiness——."

"You are too kind."

"—But I cannot permit you to utter offensive words."

"To you who are responsible for my evil training!"

"Félicien!" and M. Limerel struck the table with his clenched fist, and sprang up, pushing back his chair. "I order you to leave the room!"

"Not yet! Not till I have shown you the injury you have done me. I have come for that. I have come to avenge it! Do you understand?"

"What ails you both, Victor, Félicien? What is the meaning of this scene, these angry voices?" cried Mme. Limerel, entering hastily from her own room, and catching her son by the arm. "How cold you are! How you are trembling! The poor boy is ill."

"No," said the father stepping forward. "He is insolent, and I have requested him to leave the room."

"My Félicien! I do not understand."

"I should have preferred not to have you here, mother," he said. "To you I would speak more gently."

"He accuses us of having brought him up badly," said his father. "Of being the cause of his unhappiness."

"Oh! what can he mean?" she cried.

"He announced to me, my dear," M. Limerel proceeded, "that he considers himself unworthy of our pious niece Marie, that he feels he is not a good enough Christian to marry her; and the cause of his not being so, he lays at your door and mine, Elsa."

She dropped her son's hand and fell back, turning to her husband, whose anger always cowed her, as she faltered:

"He is unhappy, and unjust in consequence; that is but natural. Let him explain himself. Since we have never done him any wrong, God knows! it is better that the child should not keep to himself the reproaches he thinks he has the right to bring against us. Come, Félicien, we are willing to listen to you, your father and I, but on condition that you speak with proper respect. How can you accuse us of not bringing you up like a Christian? Remember the education we have given you."

"Yes, Félicien," pursued M. Limerel, "your mother is right. It would have been preferable, on some accounts, considering my own interests, to send you to a government school. I should have secured, in that way, certain advantages and a certain influence."

"The rosette in short," broke in Félicien. "Why not call it by its name?"

"Let me answer for you, Victor. Yes, the rosette. What can you find to blame, my son, in your father's laudable ambitions? The rosette is something, after all, and he is entitled to wear it. He might have done like many other people of stricter principles than we profess—he might have sent you to a lycée. But he gave up the idea at my request. We chose for you an institution conducted by ecclesiastics. Is that what you reproach us for?"

"No," he replied. "I had early Christian training, I recognise it. I received more religious

instruction and saw more examples of faith among my masters than most of the men of my generation. That should have sufficed, and often has done, to build up a sound faith, but on one condition. It is that the family life should be in harmony with these instructions."

"Well—what of ours?"

"I have seen at home too many examples which did not agree with the lessons taught at school, and I have learned to doubt."

"You have seen excellent people, Félicien."

"I have seen that you all placed many things before religion."

"What, for instance? I beg you to tell me."

"The enumeration would be long, if I chose. It includes the whole of life, or what is called by that name: the whirl of amusement, luxury, honours, the future—yours and perhaps mine also. I have seen that you failed to defend the principles I had once been taught to venerate, the men who had been held up to me as examples; and that you allowed matters to be freely discussed, here in your house——"

"Oh! a little freedom of conversation! A great affair!" exclaimed M. Limerel.

"Let him finish, Victor."

"I saw, even, that you approved this language which at first horrified me. The influences of your salon were not always a training in virtue. Who was ever concerned to practise these teachings?"

"That is too much! Did not your mother preside over your first communion, and with what affectionate solemnity!"

"But afterwards, in the years that followed, who sustained me in my youthful aspirations? Who ever tried to divine my doubts and to answer them? Who ever interested themselves in my reading? I read everything, without guidance——"

"Félicien!"

"In short, I have never understood from the life here at home that religion was the law by which we should be guided. That is what I reproach you with. If you are, after all, a believer at heart, father——"

M. Limerel, stunned by the violence of his son's words, had protested but feebly, but now, at last, hearing his faith doubted, he exclaimed vehemently:

"Of course I am a believer!"

"Then you should have been one fundamentally, and have made of my childish faith the law, the light, the strength of my life. I have none of all these—neither law nor strength nor joy. If you are a believer and if what you believe exists, from what a heaven you banished me!"

"You are talking wildly, Félicien. You are not such as you describe. Reflect upon the harsh accusations you are bringing against me and your mother."

He no longer spoke with irritation. He was groping uncertainly and blindly in this unsuspected world which his son had opened before him.

"I had noticed," he said, "that you had given up all religious observances."

"And you did not suffer on that account?"

"I did not tell you so. I attributed the change to errors of conduct; I felt that I had no right to be exacting in matters of piety, that I ought not to restrain your liberty."

"That is what you call never coming to my aid, never suspecting, never inquiring, never seeing that if I had a soul it was once yours and was being destroyed——"

"If we had understood," broke in his mother, "we would have tried."

"Your mother says truly, that if we had known——"

They both approached to take his hand, but he retreated towards the door.

"No, you would have changed nothing in your lives," he said, "for you had not the will; you could have changed nothing in mine, for it was already too late. Now it is all over with my faith; it is all over with the love that was in my heart; and with you also, my father, my mother, it is all over between us!"

"Do you mean to leave us, Félicien?"

Mme. Limerel sprang forward with arms extended. "No, it is not true!" she cried. "He does not know what he is saying, this child; he was pale a moment ago, now his face is scarlet; he is beside himself."

"I shall not leave at once, but as soon as I can. My presence will cause you more regret than happiness. I shall be a constant reminder of the wrong that has been done me here. Adieu!"

"Go!" said his father. "It is better so. I do

not know how I have endured this so long. Now go! Go at once!"

Félicien left the room with a deliberate step, while his father and mother stood listening as he passed down the corridor; then his mother called after him:

"Come back, my child, come back!"

"No, let him go!" said his father. "Leave him alone! I forbid you to call him back!"

They both listened, holding their breath until his footsteps died away, then M. Limerel added:

"I forbid you to follow him and to contrive theatrical scenes which I, his father, am to accept as sufficient expiation for all the insults I have endured. It is I who will dictate terms of forgiveness. I do not propose to let your weak indulgence intervene. I have been seriously, odiously insulted! Why do you not speak? Why do you stare at me without a word?"

She was no longer, as was her custom, bending before him in fear and admiration. The violence of her distress had roused another woman within her, no longer submissive to his will, but stirred by thoughts of her own and a sort of exalted courage.

"*Mon ami*," she said, "he has judged us!"

"How dare you say such a thing? Judged us, indeed!"

"And he is right, perhaps."

"What! Félicien right in his attitude towards us? You have a singular fashion, which I am familiar with, of defending your husband. You

comprehend nothing, then? If I failed to stand up more vigorously against him——”

“It was because you felt as I did, that he was partly in the right.”

“Not at all! I allowed him to pour forth his anger, because it will give me an advantage over him later. When he talks of pretended wrongs towards him I shall be able to reproach him with his positive wrongs towards me. Yes, I hold him, if you do not throw yourself between us with your usual heedlessness. He will need money. Have you thought of that?”

“You are mistaken. All the money you may give or refuse him will not alter his judgment of us. He does not respect us, he, our own son! He has told us so, and we have endured it!”

She followed her husband, who, with a shrug of the shoulders, had seated himself once more with his letters and papers before him. She remained standing beside him, and laid her hand on his arm.

“I assure you, Victor, that we are greatly to blame in this,” she said.

“Nonsense!”

“Yes, I saw it all while Félicien was speaking—I said to myself that ours had been a religion of mere outward show.”

“Different from that of those bigots at the Madeleine, happily. Yes, I admit it. What next?”

With increasing energy Elsa Limerel pursued:

“We are not the Christians we profess to be. When our whims are gratified, our ambitions

fulfilled, our fortunes safe, what remains of the religion we have sacrificed to these ends? What truth is there indeed which has not been attacked beneath our roof, and which we have ventured to defend? It is a fine religion, ours, my poor husband; it is the religion of respectability."

"It is the same as other people's. I have worked, that has been my affair, and for you who are reproaching me with it to-day!"

"A show religion," she went on. "A Sunday religion which we hold cheap on week-days."

"How strait-laced you are turning all at once, my dear!"

"Oh, no jesting, I beg, Victor. I tell you, seriously, I believe that we have lost our son. When I saw Félicien leaving us just now, my heart cried out, 'we are punished!' As we grow old we learn to see above the home the light from heaven, or else darkness. I see us both condemned!"

"Enough, my dear; your whole catechism seems coming back to you. I recommend you to lower your voice, for I hear one of the maids coming. Wipe your eyes, quickly!"

Some one was, in fact, approaching; the door opened and Marie Limerel appeared on the threshold. She had assured herself that Félicien was not at home, and with her simple courage she desired an understanding with his father and mother, feeling that anything was better than a silent quarrel. She paused before entering. "I came to tell you," she said, "how unhappy I am——"

M. Limerel, who had risen, pointed to his wife, exclaiming:

"I can readily believe it. You can see, my poor Marie, what misery you have caused."

"Come," said Mme. Limerel, taking the young girl by the hand, and drawing her nearer. Then pointing in her turn to the man who, for the first time in his life, sought only to escape from her, she cried: "Look at him well, for I want to tell you to his face that you have done right, Marie. You wish to marry only a sincere Christian, and you are right. In such a marriage there is truth, happiness, and a deep mutual understanding. Do not weaken! Do not marry a half-believer. You are weeping now, but it is only then that you would know what real suffering is."

"You see, Marie," exclaimed M. Limerel, "that she is quite out of her head," and so speaking he left the room with a shrug, though his face had flushed scarlet.

As the two women passed on into Mme. Limerel's room, Marie spoke again:

"He was admirable in his loyalty. He would not buy me at the cost of a falsehood. You must tell him that I shall esteem him always for having been victorious over himself."

His mother murmured: "While they are still young, they have moments of nobility and courage. Later they show themselves as they really are."

"We shall see each other later," faltered Marie in return, "but a long time hence. You will explain to him that I should fear not being brave

enough now. It tortured me to make him suffer. Oh, that I should be the one to cause so much suffering!"

Mme. Limerel laid her hand caressingly on Marie's heated brow.

"You are deeply grieved, my poor Marie," she said.

"Oh, yes!"

"But, believe me, the greatest grief comes later; that grief which is softened by no approving conscience, no memories of courage." Then she added: "You love him. You have loved him."

The girl did not answer but the look in her eyes spoke for her.

"You love him, and I, his mother, feel that I have no right to plead for him, to say: 'Go on loving him.' No, I cannot say it, and this silence is my condemnation. I am guilty."

They exchanged but a few words more, their anxiety lest Félicien should return caused them both to pause and listen, and at last with a more affectionate embrace than ever before, Marie said:

"Dear aunt, I have never truly known you."

"My poor child, so many women are not their true selves until it is late—too late!"

IV

"How fond I am growing of this Roman life, Marie," Mme. Limerel was saying.

"You mean of life in Rome, mamma, as we are living in a hotel and you really cannot call that Roman life."

"That is nothing. I mean our delightful days here, our pilgrimages to the churches, our rambles through the city, now that we are no longer mere tourists, collecting postcards and new to everything. Do you not feel as I do? It seems to me that I have the very look of Rome stamped on my heart now; not the superficial look which one discovers at once, but the inner expression that completes the image. Is it so with you? Ah, *chérie*, what priceless hours!"

"Do you think I do not prize them, too?" returned Marie.

"They renew my soul."

"You are far younger than I, mamma."

"I am freer, perhaps, from hopes and expectations. I surrender myself more fully and demand less. That is sometimes the better way."

They were seated in the Pincian gardens, which face the setting sun and crown the city so nobly. Many times since their arrival in Rome, they had spent the late afternoon hours there, reading to

each other by turns in an undertone. The soft air of the terrace, the sheltering trees which frame the distant landscape, the glorious sunset hour which seems so essential a part of Rome, all combined for their enchantment. They had even selected a special garden-bench, where they usually sat, not in that part of the gardens adjoining the Villa Medici, but at the farther end, beneath a group of ancient ilexes which arch above the Piazza del Popolo.

The girl, who had ceased reading some moments before, but still held the book propped on her knee ready to begin again, now let it fall and laid her hand across the open pages. At the same time she drew herself up and shook her head several times as if about to protest, but merely sighed without uttering a word.

Mme. Limerel softly patted the clasped hand which unfolded in response to her caress.

"Marie," she said, "I wish I could see your former courage and high spirits returning. You have your bright days—very bright, as yesterday at Albano—but there come sad ones, too. When you are sad you are less pretty."

"Pretty! That is my last thought. And for whom?"

"For me, dear, who need your joy to prove to me that I have brought you up and loved you as I ought, and made you strong against yourself."

"Oh, you need have no fear! I have not changed. But I have been so strong against myself and others, too, that I am sometimes weary. There are moments when it seems to me

that I could never do again what I have done, it has cost me so dear. And yet I do not regret. On the contrary, I see more and more clearly that it was right——”

“So much the better.”

“—That I have escaped, thanks to a sort of ready response to duty, which you have taught me or transmitted to me, from a life which would have been very unhappy or very bad, possibly both. No, my mind does not hesitate. But the sorrow I have caused! Who will cure that?”

“Time, my child.”

“And in my heart, who will cure it? Love in us women is made up almost wholly of the desire to give happiness—and I have given only suffering. Do you understand? I have made another suffer.”

“Oh, it is a suffering that does not last, except in books, and in a few very pure hearts. But they are so rare! What is Félicien doing now? Do you know?”

“Yes, dearest.”

“He has written to you?”

“Yes; two letters which reached me in Burgundy.”

“And I knew nothing of it!”

“I even answered one of them. It was wrong of me not to show them to you. Pray forgive me, dearest. I see that I have given you pain.”

“And this time it is pain which you *may* regret causing, for I have not deserved it.”

“It is true. I did wrong. You shall see them, I promise you.”

“What did he say?”

“That I had cast him back forever upon his doubts.”

“You have merely refused to follow him.”

“He said other sad things. The second time I did not answer. All is over now.”

Marie bent closer to her mother. “You see he loved me. I had never been loved before—the power that word has over us dies slowly. Do you not think so?”

“You are a true woman, Marie,” said her mother, embracing her. Then they both ceased speaking, and in the silence their thoughts followed the same path. They had spoken in hushed tones, and their movements had changed so slightly the grouping of light and shade cast by their figures, that three women seated on another bench beneath the same roof of ilex boughs—a young mother, a blooming nurse from the Campagna, in her lace cap and bright ribbons, and a pale, indifferent school-girl—had not observed the presence of these motionless and dreamy strangers.

The few passers-by in this remote nook of the garden barely glanced at them, and already the stream of promenaders was turning back towards the city.

Some were strolling in the splendour of the evening, beneath the overarching foliage which autumn does not tinge, others along the wall which encircles the hill in the full flood of golden light. In the throng were women leading their children by the hand, tired clerks who had escaped from their desks, soldiers, students, and

groups of seminarists, with their blue and scarlet sashes, all drawn homeward at the summons of the Ave Maria, that curfew which calls the people as a shepherd his flock, and which at that season rang before six o'clock. The level rays of the sun, streaming across the city, bathed the tree-trunks and fell on Marie's brow, while the sweetness of those last gleams stole into her heart.

"You have escaped a danger which you see clearly enough now," her mother was saying. "In future you must not let unreasoning regrets dim your sense of the splendid gift of life—nothing petty or unworthy of you."

"Why do you speak so of my regrets? Why am I forbidden to cherish them? They can harm no one."

"They impair your own strength. You are not their prisoner as you believe. It is you who draw them about you. You give to the slightest words, to childish memories, a power they did not have over your heart in those days. You do this, Marie, to make your decision not to marry Félicien seem harder than it really was, harsher towards yourself."

"No, not towards me."

"Yes, to yourself first, and also more exceptional, more heroic. You build up a half fanciful sorrow and immure yourself within it. Oh, I can read your heart. I know the poor human heart which so often deceives itself. There is pride in your pain."

"There is much pity, too, believe me."

"Well, keep your pity, dear, but in God's sight

only, and drive away the rest—all the echoes of what might have been. Sacrifice the memory of your love, since you have given up the love itself."

By way of answer Marie took up the book which lay in her lap, turned the first pages, and closed it slowly. She did it mechanically, with no thought of what her gesture symbolised. Then in the penetrating tone which reveals the mind wholly present in the words, she said:

"I will try. I believe you are right in everything."

"You must rise higher, Marie. You must rise to where you can find peace."

"Where is it found, dearest?"

"There, where we are not. Forget yourself," and as she spoke Mme. Limerel rose, and pointing through the branches to the setting sun, added with a smile:

"Up yonder. Come, let us go and watch the last gleams of daylight. We have been talking so seriously that I feel the need of drawing a freer breath. If the Romans who are taking their *passeggiata* here had heard our talk they would resent such gravity in an hour like this."

Marie had already risen. "But I do not. Our talk has done me so much good! But we really have no time to lose. See! the sun is just sinking behind the portico of St. Peter's. How the city seems made to bask in sunlight! It lays in such stores all day that by evening it becomes translucent for a moment. Look over there at the quarter beyond the Tiber!"

Mme. Limerel leaned over the balustrade while Marie stood erect beside her, both wrapped about in the glowing light and the soft breeze from the west; both with their eyes full of the same wonder and delight, both with minds open and eager, and one of them giving thanks that the child, the soul so dear to her, was growing strong again.

From the heights of the Pincio, the city within its encircling walls appeared slightly hollowed at the centre, while to the south it rose in more billowy curves, crowned with more domes, bell-fries, and ruins, everywhere intense in colour and warm to the eye. The flat, white-washed roofs, the tiles, the reddish-yellow façades, all that was built to shelter man, was lighted now by reflection only. But these valleys of stone, closely built and compressed as they were, seemed to emit innumerable rays of light, for the air above them quivered like a field of golden sheaves. Then night stole rapidly over the scene, as the first violet-blue shadows crept nearer and nearer.

"The daylight is dying," said Mme. Limerel.

"No, the garden still catches the light. See, mamma! those stone pines are like tufts of gold."

"They are fading now; it is all over. Only the dome of St. Peter's sees the vanished sun."

"And that of Santa Maria Maggiore."

For a few moments longer they stood there in silence until a breath of chill wind shook the leaves on the terrace and died away, then a second breath followed, laden with the dampness

of the Campagna marshes. The church-bells, voices of all the ages, chimed the Ave Maria. The gardens were already deserted.

"The sky remains clear," said Mme. Limerel. "Come, it will be a lovely evening."

They skirted the terrace, and near the Villa Medici descended by a hollow road winding between walls and gardens and emerging on the Piazza di Spagna.

"Here we are at home!" exclaimed Marie, "in the yellowest corner of Rome, the region of the *pietra rossa*. All these houses try, as they grow old, to look like palaces. A charming coquetry, is it not?"

"Where shall we hear mass to-morrow?"

"Wherever you choose."

"Let it be at some church we have not yet visited. What do you say to our neighbour, the Trinità de' Monti, which is open only on Sunday mornings?"

As she spoke they both turned instinctively to look up the great stairway which they would ascend in the morning. Then they skirted the little parterre, with its five tall palms, and entered the Hotel de Londres where they were staying.

It was the sixteenth of October, and they had been a fortnight in Rome, finding there the diversion they both needed, and enjoying a "solitude à deux" which showed them how dear they were to each other, and gave fresh power to the words they exchanged, the emotions they shared, and even their very silences. Mme. Limerel was not mistaken in her belief that the influence of

the past was gradually losing its hold over Marie's heart.

On the day following the last interview between Marie and Félicien, M. Victor Limerel had appeared in the Avenue d'Antin, very correct and pompous, expressing no regrets, but imposing his will, as usual.

"Madeleine," he said, "I have asked to see you alone, because I do not wish to have a scene, and it would be painful to me to utter any reproaches. I foresaw beforehand what has taken place. I was perfectly aware of all the reasons which made a marriage between my son and your daughter impossible. Your fault, or Marie's, or that of you both, was in not understanding this earlier. Your weakness has produced great unhappiness, as you are aware. I have no confidences to make you; but my son has shown himself greatly wanting in his duty to us. He talks of taking an apartment outside my house; we have come to that. Such is the work of—oh! do not defend yourself. You know that with me it is useless. I have told you what has already taken place; it only remains for me to tell you what is to be in future. One thing which will never be permitted is this utterly irrational marriage. You agree with me as to that? So much the better. I desire to reaffirm to you Félicien's decision, which my wife approves as I do. Yes, my wife! She may have differed from me at first, but I have brought her to my point of view. And in consequence, if it is agreeable to you, my dear sister-in-law, we will meet less frequently

in future. But there is no occasion that the world should be made acquainted with our family differences. I shall be silent on the subject, so will you. We shall exchange greetings, of course, when we meet in our friends' houses, but anything more we will postpone, shall we not, to some future day?"

Mme. Limerel had simply replied: "I am less harsh than you. Our children are, henceforth, irrevocably parted. It is a necessity, a fortunate one, if you like. But I regret above all that the suffering should be theirs while the fault was yours. I regret what might have been. Adieu."

Shortly after this, at the beginning of July, she had left Paris with her daughter. Two months with relations in Burgundy had not restored Marie's health and spirits, as her mother had hoped. Marie's dear eyes—those "tea-coloured" eyes—had not lost their charming habit of looking straight into yours as she listened, of being limpid and steadfast, and of softening as she spoke, but dark shadows had gathered around them. The lips, with their delicate curves, still smiled, but slight though the effort was, it was perceptible, and the wish to give pleasure could not replace the spontaneous gaiety of youth. While peace returned to her, her strength seemed to diminish, and her mother was growing anxious. She felt that she had been too hasty in accepting the invitation of the cousins in Burgundy. Château life, with its constant round of visits, sports and excursions, the monotonous excitement of the holidays, the exuberance of a flock of children,

the eager attentions of an aunt and cousins, all drawn to Marie by the hint of a love-secret, were ill adapted to heal a proud and reserved nature. The distractions of society avail little against a cherished sorrow; they rather tend to drive the mind back upon itself, to stimulate its regrets by their futility, making its own pain seem nobler and these diversions emptier than they really are.

The mother understood this at last, and carried her daughters away to a quiet valley in the canton of Fribourg, and when the time came for the younger girl to return to England, continued to travel with Marie alone. Solitude gradually did its work of healing, bringing back the whole past to the girl's conscience. In the inner silence the higher reasons which had led to her decision and had thronged to her aid only to utter the word "Refuse!" now spoke more fully, and those spiritual powers which bring a hard-won peace said to her sad heart:

"We have not deceived you. We were stationed about you to protect your weakness. See how little you can rely on your own strength, since, after obeying us, you can still doubt. Men judge with a shallow judgment, and their shallowness is cruel. They call that an ill-assorted marriage where they see differences of education, of fortune or family, while they overlook the infinite disparities, the misalliances of soul. Child, no human tenderness is worth the price you would have paid for it. We are the primal compassion; the suffering we impose lasts but for a time."

Marie listened and the eternal summits began to grow clear.

On Sunday morning, a little before nine o'clock, as Mme. Limerel issued from the hotel with her daughter, they exclaimed with one voice:

"Oh, the beautiful morning!" and basking in the joy of the sunlight, they traversed the short distance between their door and the church. The "yellowest corner of Rome" was more sparkling than usual, the spray from the fountain on the piazza caught a rainbow as it fell, and the famous staircase opposite looked as though the white cascade of stones had been built to hold the sunshine. There was no shadow on the travertine, which gleamed everywhere like polished marble, and as Marie laid her hand on the balustrade, she found it warm to the touch.

People were flocking up and down this radiant cleft in the hill, and at its base the flower-sellers were displaying the flowers of the season—a few roses, carnations, chrysanthemums, and sprays of Japanese anemone. Above, the Trinità de' Monti raised its lofty façade, with the twin towers stained yellow long ago that their outline might be less harsh against the blue of the sky.

The church was nearly full; one side of the high grating which divides it being reserved for the pupils of the Sacré Cœur. Seated close together, with their white veils, *à la vierge*, falling over their shoulders, they formed a patch of dazzling whiteness, framed by the black robes of the

nuns. At the first sight Marie recognised France, and became absorbed in recollections. She had so often seen these veils worn by her friends in the great convents of Paris, and a similar one was now covering the far from nun-like head of her little sister in England.

The lower half of the nave was filled by parents of the pupils and residents of the quarter, with a sprinkling of peasants such as are always to be seen praying in the Roman churches, motionless and with upturned eyes.

Marie and her mother rapidly traversed this throng and found a place near the grating. The officiating priest stood before the altar, which was tastefully and lovingly adorned with fresh flowers and foliage.

No man could fail to be reminded by this sight of the pure hands which had decorated the altar, and would have called up a vision of spotless youth, a little insipid and resigned, perhaps, thus proving his utter ignorance of convent life. Marie, who knew it better and was formed to understand this city of the soul, thought on the contrary of the magnificent energy of which the least of these women had given proof; how all had struggled, all had suffered, and how before gathering flowers and handling the linen upon the altar they had seen the imperious light of duty and had followed where it led. Then she turned to the service for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, and lingered over these words of the liturgy: "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season."

How many words like these are scattered through the Christian year, in order that poor human hopes may not fail—those hopes so necessary to all, so trembling, unstable, and soon put to flight! What a deep knowledge of human nature had placed there for the ages the answer which even happiness needs, since it craves continuance: “Thou givest them their meat,” but in due season only, when they have renounced the thought of obtaining it from the earth alone and from those who dwell upon it.

At the moment of the communion Marie and her mother made their way to the choir, where they knelt at the altar railing. At Marie’s left a man was kneeling. She did not see him until she rose to regain her place. Then, low as her eyes were bent, a vague, rapid image crossed them, and vague though it was, a powerful emotion seized her. He was there in Rome, he had embraced the same faith as hers, he had received the same communion, he was walking behind her now, in her shadow. She resisted, from an instinct of reverence, the thoughts which assailed her as she returned to her place beside the grating and knelt again, troubled and humiliated by the throng of strange fancies which disturbed her devotions.

Many of the worshippers had now left the church, some were stopping to exchange greetings upon the threshold and the sound of their voices entered with the breeze blowing up the nave. The little piazza outside was only astir on this one day in the week.

Marie rose from her knees before her mother and turned to go; she was in haste to assure herself that she had not been mistaken. She looked about her for a glimpse of the figure she had half recognised, but saw only an Italian conversing with two of the sisters, a few women still seated, and some French tourists attempting to see a fresco.

Her disappointment was keen as she passed out in the midst of these Romans and foreigners, all rejoicing in the sunshine. No one was there, no one for her at least, since she did not find him for whom she was looking. She had forgotten to look beside her as she passed through the doorway. At the moment she descended the first step some one held out his hand, too deeply moved to speak. She raised her eyes and saw his face, transfigured by a joy beyond all earthly joys. She was tempted to say: "Oh, Reginald! I rejoice with you," but she kept silence, and they descended the flight of steps without a word, but with their heads raised high, their eyes fixed above the crowd, and their hearts higher still. Those who looked at them might have thought them lovers, but something surpassing ordinary tenderness enveloped them both, and their souls raised the same hymn of thankfulness.

Marie was the first to welcome this new son of the church, and he who had thought to go away rejoicing but alone, had found a friendly hand, a fraternal soul, and a memory full of his own past struggles. In the Rome now slumbering beneath the grasses, yonder along the Via Sacra in those

earlier times when the noblest of the pagan world had been attracted by the purity of the Christian rites, such a pair may have aroused the wonder and emotion of the faithful who saw them emerging from the shadow of the churches into open day: a virgin initiated from childhood in sacred things, and beside her a young patrician wearing upon his face the glory and happiness of the new life.

At the foot of the steps Mme. Limerel rejoined Marie, having only then caught sight of Reginald. Did she look upon him with any other feeling than the surprise mingled with sympathy which she was too kindly not to feel at that moment? Did she wish to prolong for an instant Marie's very innocent dream? Whatever the reason, she paused a little before saying:

"Monsieur Breynolds?"

Reginald and Marie turned towards her. Their faces wore the same expression, the same radiance, as of those who had talked long together and reached a perfect sympathy, and yet they had not spoken. Reginald greeted Mme. Limerel:

"I am like you, now," he said. "Wholly like you."

She questioned him rapidly.

"Where are you from? How long have you been here? Had you already seen us? Explain it all to me."

But as the crowd was dense about them where they stood, they descended to the lower terrace and turned into a sort of open loggia on one side. The sun poured down upon this little stage of

stone on which their moving figures cast light shadows. "We are exceedingly happy to see you, my mother and I," said Marie at last. "I cannot tell you how moved I was when I recognised you *there*."

"It is two weeks since I was received into the church," he said. "There was no one there that day—no one, I mean, who had ever known me before."

He spoke with a frank simplicity characteristic of him, while at the same time he gazed steadfastly at these two unexpected witnesses. His eyes seemed to say: "You are my family now. At the hour when so many others turn from me, it is a joy to meet you."

"What a strange meeting!" resumed Marie. "When I saw you last you were far from this in every way."

"Not so far as you imagined. Paris had decided me to come to Rome. I had seen marvels there. I wished to see their source. The months have passed very rapidly."

"You stayed in Rome through the height of summer?"

"Yes. I shall have no winter of my own."

"That is true."

"I regret nothing of these months, not even the heat," and a smile lighted up his face as he added: "I have made the longest journey a man can make. I have come to the truth."

"The hardest journey, perhaps," said Mme. Limerel.

"No, it has not been hard. It is now that the

ordeal will be a cruel one, for others as well as myself."

Reginald turned his face towards the piazza as he spoke, while his expression, and even the tones of his voice, completely changed. Mme. Limerel and Marie had before them once more the man of the world, the officer in the Indian service.

"You are staying in this quarter?" he asked.

"Yes, just below there, at the nearest hotel. We look up at this staircase whenever we go in or out."

"You wished to be near the house of Keats? Was that the reason?"

"The house of Keats?"

"Yes, look! opposite us, the loggia with a trellis. He came here to die, in that little corner palace. I am very fond of the poet who said so many moving things in so brief a time. Do you remember—" And he quoted the familiar line:

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

"Was it really for his sake that you chose this quarter of Rome?"

"Oh, no! do not fancy it. We came here partly by chance, and partly because it is the French quarter. Here are the Villa Medici and Trinità de' Monti, both French institutions, and even this stairway was built by Cardinal de Polignac, the ambassador of Louis XV. Do you see?" And Marie pointed out the tablet bearing an inscription to that effect.

The young people both smiled at these reminders of their several nationalities, but Reginald instantly turned grave again as a sudden recollection crossed his mind.

"I must take leave of you," he said to Mme. Limerel. "I have an important matter to attend to this very morning. Will you allow me to call upon you as soon as I am free?"

"Gladly, Monsieur. We shall not go out before two."

"I shall be at liberty before that. It takes so little time to give pain."

"You are right," said Marie. "One word only and sorrow comes."

He bowed and remounted the steps, while Mme. Limerel and her daughter continued to descend. At the foot they bought some flowers and then went to take tea at one of the cafés in the Via Condotti.

"What a fine manly nature!" said Marie. "To me he seems a sort of foreign brother, if one can say so. To have been a witness of his doubts, the honest doubts of one who wishes to believe, who loves what he does not yet possess, and then to be present at this act of perfect faith! That is a thing which touches me, perhaps, more than another."

"He has needed great courage."

"Yes, greater, certainly, than we can imagine."

"Since that evening at Redhall we have heard nothing of the Breynolds, or scarcely anything."

"Only what Dorothy has written."

"His parents will probably never forgive him. He must have been thinking of them just now. He will tell you, perhaps."

"No, mamma, because he is English and a man, and I am merely a woman. And besides——"

She hesitated and smiled to soften what might be wounding in her words:

"And besides, you will be present, my dear mamma. I foresee a classic reception, a blending of comradeship and reserve, after which we shall separate as we did in Paris."

Mme. Limerel's suite at the Hotel de Londres consisted of a salon and two bedrooms on the first floor, looking out on the piazza. It was in this salon, furnished with heavy gilt chairs and sofas covered with red satin, that they received Reginald. He was grave and absent-minded, and replied with a visible effort to Mme. Limerel's friendly questionings. She had expected him to talk readily of Rome, and was surprised at the polite indifference he showed to the monuments, pictures, ruins, and scenery which she enumerated with the ardour of her French nature, and the enthusiasm of a traveller who has but lately discovered Italy. The names which enchanted her and called up vivid pictures to her mind he scarcely noticed—the view of Rome from the Janiculum, St. Paul's Without the Walls, the little church of San Onofrio, the gardens, the Campagna, the wagoners from the Castelli Romani sheltered beneath their gay awnings. Had this

Englishman grasped nothing of the Rome where he had been living for three months?

"How did you happen, Monsieur, to come to the Trinità de' Monti this morning? You are lodging, you say, in the Aventine quarter near the ruins?"

"It was simply that I had not yet seen it."

"Like ourselves."

"Oh, I am far from having seen everything! I am not a traveller, interested above all in the city itself. I must come again for that, in five years or so, perhaps. I shall hope to find some of my new friends here then."

He named one of his compatriots, a Benedictine who had instructed, guided, and sustained him through his period of study and doubt.

"He is a sort of Thomas Winne in a monk's frock," he said, looking at Marie. "Not in appearance, but in his tenacity, his vigorous reasoning powers, and his friendship for me."

But on this subject neither Mme. Limerel nor Marie wished to question him, and he spoke but briefly. He lingered, however, and Marie, who divined this soul at once so confiding and so reserved, Marie the born consoler, with her intuitive sense of the neighbourhood of trouble, suddenly said:

"I am sure that you would like to take a walk with us!"

"Yes, that is the very thing."

"And you did not dare to ask? Why? You have some chosen nook in Rome that you would like to show us, and see whether we share your admiration? Have I guessed right?"

"Very nearly."

"Only very nearly?"

Reginald's eyes were full of a single, overmastering thought in which all others were swallowed up and lost. Thus had he looked on that day in the park of Redhall when the son of the house had asked counsel of the little foreigner whom he thought never to see again.

Marie rose with a slight wave of her hand, saying: "Wait for us, we will be ready in five minutes."

Reginald gazed at her as one waking from a dream, then hastened to say:

"No, I beg that it may be for to-morrow. That will be my last day in Rome."

"You are leaving Rome?"

"Not only Rome, but Europe soon, and everything."

He pronounced these last syllables with a sadness which went to the heart, and without turning his eyes from Marie.

Mme. Limerel, who was impulsive and easily moved, approached him as if she had heard the news of some sudden bereavement. He tried to smile and thank her, and although he did not resemble his father, he had at that moment the expression of sorrowful irony, the attitude of defying and commanding fate which at times made Sir George's face so tragic.

"To-morrow," said Mme. Limerel, "I am not quite free, as I am expecting an old friend."

"You can bring her, too, mamma; she will not be in the way, poor Madame Villier! Let us take

this walk with Monsieur Breynolds, since you see that he cares about it."

"So be it. We will go wherever you say. Monsieur. To-morrow at three, if you like."

Reginald did not answer at once, but waited till his face had obeyed the command of his will and grown less stern and sad, then he said with an attempt at cheerfulness which still excited pity:

"To-day I have something else to ask. You will laugh at me, Madame."

"Oh, no, surely not!"

"We are sometimes rather superstitious in England, and perhaps I am so still. You must pardon some weaknesses in a new convert."

As he spoke he drew a letter from his pocket. "I have been writing this letter, which has cost me more than any I have ever written. No, I cannot remember ever tracing words with such pain. There are some cruel ones, you know. I have asked a great favour, one which will be hard to grant." And he held the letter out to Marie.

"I should like the purest of hands to mail it. I feel as if the request I am making would thus have more chance of not being refused by one who is very hard, very stern. Will you do this for me?"

"Go together," said Mme. Limerel. "You are both young and both sad, and it will be a way of helping one another. You know the letter-box, Marie, across the piazza. Go!"

Marie took the letter and ran to put on her hat. She then led the way down the stairs without a

word, but distress and pity were in both their hearts, and they felt life vibrating between them.

As they crossed the piazza Reginald said: "Read the address."

Marie raised the letter in the sunlight and read:

"Sir George Breynolds, Bart.,
"Eden Hotel, Pallanza."

"Your father is at Pallanza?"

"Yes, with Robert Hargreave. I count very much on Hargreave, for he knows all. No, do not drop the letter in yet. Listen! you have the right to know what it contains, for it is the direct consequence, the end of a painful conflict in which you bore a part."

"Do you regret it?"

"No, I thank you for it all. Sorrow has come from it, but a happiness too, surpassing all—the happiness of this morning, which will endure and in the end will stifle the pain."

He spoke more freely now; his youth confiding again in her who had been involved once before in this unfinished drama, the counsellor of courage, the loyal spirit who had kept silence and asked for no return.

"Come this way into the shade," he said, and he led Marie a few steps down the Via San Sebastiano, which was sheltered from the sun. She wore again the deeply thoughtful look of one who is appealed to for help, and is conscious of being able to give it, and yet fears to exercise a power which reaches out into the unknown.

"I can repeat it by heart," he said. "Listen:

“MY DEAR FATHER: Every word you said to me on the day when, at your command, I left Redhall is stamped on my memory. You spoke in anger caused by me, but they were words you believed to be true and for my good. I would not reproach you for one of them. You were within your rights as a father, and such as I never doubted I should find you. I realise now that you knew me better than I knew myself. It appeared to you that my conduct in several instances was dictated by a beginning of allegiance to the Catholic faith, not by mere detachment from my earlier beliefs. I suffered for that faith even before being fully conscious that it was mine. This very suffering must prove to you, my dear father, that my adherence to the greatest church has not been given without deep study, reflection, and prayer. I am sure you will not believe for a moment that I have been able to incur your disapproval and cause you deep regret, without being forced to do so by the supreme rule which should guide a man in all things, and which you have yourself taught me to follow—devotion to the truth. Father, the Eucharist which I saw raised upon the hills of England has become mine. For a week I have participated in the sacraments of the Roman Church. It was a Benedictine of our own nation who gave me spiritual instruction. A week ago when I was received into the church, several English brothers were beside me. I would have given my life to have all those who are dear to me there also. I am about to return to Assam, my dear father; it is a long journey, as you know. I

wish from my heart not to undertake this journey without seeing you again. I entreat you to receive me. You need not approve what I have done because you receive me, but it will make my sorrow a little less heavy—yours too, perhaps—if we can see each other once more. I shall await your answer Wednesday, at Pallanza.

“And now I fulfil the promise I gave you. Since you have decided that Redhall should be taken from me, you can do as you see fit.

“Your affectionate son,

“REGINALD BREYNOLDS.’

“That is my letter. It was a very painful one to write. I was almost moved to tears, I, a man, at the thought of leaving without seeing him again. But if *you* post the letter there will be a blessing on it. He cannot refuse. There, drop it in.”

Marie’s fingers tightly clasped the letter which now seemed to her alive and speaking. In spite of the dazzling sunshine, she saw the houses across the piazza through a veil of mist.

“Redhall will not be yours, then?”

“No.”

She would not allow herself to judge where Reginald did not, but as she stood there pale, proud, and trembling a little:

“You are very brave,” she said. “I could not have believed that such a fate hung upon this letter. What you have told me now, and what you said to me once before, I shall never forget.”

Then she stepped across the sunny space to the box and dropped the letter slowly, listening to the muffled sound it made as it fell, while Reginald gazed after her until she rejoined him.

"To-morrow, then, I shall bid you good-by," he said, as they walked away. "This time it seems to me that we shall not meet again. I wish you every joy in your engagement."

She turned her head away abruptly, saying: "But I am not engaged."

"What! I thought you were to marry—"

"No. We are not to be married. I, too, have had a great sorrow. *Au revoir!*"

They had reached the hotel as she spoke, and Marie entered quickly, leaving Reginald outside. He thought he saw her from a distance wave him a friendly farewell, yet he remained standing before the door through which she had vanished, half expecting her to return.

A carriage driving up, full of travellers, obliged him to retreat, and he walked away towards the centre of the city, his heart beating rapidly. His mind was tossed and buffeted by the tempest within him, by all the thronging troubles he had already foreseen, and others rising before him. He tried to make head against the howling pack. He heard their cries:

"Your father has renounced you, your mother is in tears, Redhall is lost to you! Countless affections are wounded; there is nothing left you but to flee! All the treasure of love built up for you by your parents and friends, your old comradeships, the ivy on the walls of home, the pond that

will spread its blossoms for other eyes, all sacrificed by you, all! Madman who have despised that wealth of love which enriched your youth!"

He kept repeating as he walked along the streets: "I have done right. I will not count up my griefs. God has counted them for me. Such thoughts will weaken me. Away with them!"

Then another voice, a new one, powerful as all the rest together, said: "Marie is free and you never dreamed of it. Marie is free, free, free!"

How little he resembled the busy or idle promenaders he passed, or even himself of the day before, or that very morning! On he went along the Corso and the Piazza Venezia, through the narrow streets around the Forum. Nothing roused his interest, no vision penetrated through his eyes to his brain. Dead was the city around him; dead the memories which rise before us all as we pass along its ways. He was cut off even from the memories of his Roman summer, the morning throng, the palaces, the fountains, all the known and unknown which had enveloped him, by this torrent of new emotions. She alone occupied his heart. She was all his world. She created and destroyed in an instant visions far clearer and more real than those about him: a whole past of tears, and Marie free, Marie by whom he might have made himself loved, Marie indifferent whom he must lose with all the rest!

He did not yield before these assaults. A sort of anger animated him, the excitement of the tried wrestler who will not be conquered, and who is not at his first victory. He had walked so rapidly

that his brow was hot and throbbing as he turned into the shaded path between deep walls which climbs the deserted slopes of the Aventine. He stopped before the door of the Abbey of St. Anselm, which is occupied by the college of the Benedictine Order. The porter recognized him at once, and Reginald rejoiced, so in need was he of sympathy, and recalled, as he did so, the old gardener at home on the night he was exiled.

"Is Dom Austin Vivian here?"

"No, he is not."

"Ah, I am sorry to hear that. I wanted so much to see him. I will come back a little while before the Ave Maria."

"He is not in Rome," said the friar. "He was called away several days ago. Here is a letter he left for you."

The sunset was approaching its most golden hour, and before leaving, Reginald wished to gaze for the last time at the noble prospect which those meditative souls have always spread out before them. But he found that it no longer spoke peace to his troubled heart. His last look was at the door which had so often opened to him, the door of carved chestnut—most imperishable of woods—in a setting of white marble, with an inscription over it which he read once more: "*Pax æterna ab æterno.*" Peace, that wealth which no wealth can buy, which he had once possessed and was seeking still, but as those who know that they shall find it again, that it has withdrawn a little way in order to be better loved, but not too far to hear the dropping of our tears.

He went away feeling that he was utterly alone in life, but that on the morrow there would be Marie. The footpaths were deserted, the walls on either side re-echoed his hasty steps. He continued to ascend to the summit of the hill where stood an inn surrounded by a small vineyard, where he had hired a room looking down over Rome. He entered, but did not approach his window as was his wont every evening. He seated himself before the plain deal table and buried his face in his hands. Cruel thoughts, tenacious thoughts, still assailed him, but at moments he felt a sense of succour as he murmured:

"Come to my help, O God! to the help of one who is very poor. All the beings upon whom my heart has leaned have, one by one, withdrawn from me. I am reduced to my own weakness and Thy power. It is best so. My father banished me, my friend was absent when I most needed counsel, my new friend fails me to-day. They held but for a moment the place I thought a lasting one. And she whom I shall see to-morrow! How will it be between us? Grant to me who am timid and silent the courage to speak to Marie. Grant that her answer may be according to Thy will, Thou Dispenser of the supreme and promised peace!"

He had no sense of the flight of time. When he rose and looked around at the dim walls of his room, the stars were shining in at the window, and far below, in the deep valley, gardens, huts, and ruins slumbered and the calm, cold, silent night spread over all, allaying the dust and tumult of the day.

On the following afternoon, at three o'clock, when Reginald entered the reading-room of the Hotel de Londres he found there Mme. Limerel, Marie, and an old lady dressed in black, to whom he was presented,—a tall, thin lady, comfortably ensconced on the sofa, with a light silk scarf over her shoulders which she was constantly redraping, and who had the direct, serious, and at the same time amused expression of those who have travelled a great deal, and who instinctively weigh and compare whatever they see—landscapes, jewels, accents, men's clothes, and the tones of their voices.

"You remind me, Monsieur Breynolds," she said, "of an Englishman I met on the Bosphorus, who wore precisely the same sort of travelling costume, with the blouse and knickerbockers of brown—or is it green? It must be very practical. Your tailors have never invented anything better."

He bowed, and it was chiefly with this elderly globe-trotter that he conversed while they climbed the Spanish steps and wound around the edge of the terraced gardens. Marie followed in silence with her mother, knowing that this was but a temporary diversion. The attention he lent to the most commonplace questions was too elaborate, he took too much pains to answer fully, while at the same time turning aside from anything which approached the personal, even avoiding the vague expressions in which youth often veils an insistent trouble in an unconscious appeal for sympathy.

Marie, meanwhile, pursued the dream which had absorbed her the previous evening, and all that morning. She understood that she should again have this hidden soul opened to her, and that the hour was approaching. At last Mme. Limerel asked Reginald:

“Where are you taking us, Monsieur?”

They had walked half-way along the terrace, skirting the Pincian hill. He cast a glance about him, like one who has come a long distance without being aware of it, and replied:

“I do not know. It is all quite the same to me.”

“You promised, you know, to show us one of your favourite spots.”

He thought for a moment:

“Have you been to the Piazza di Siena?”

“No, never.”

“Let us go there, then.”

The little party turned to the right and crossed the garden between beds of withered flowers—dahlias, roses, pinks, and sage, whose foliage was already dead, but which still showed bright bits of colour on the top of their elongated stalks. The pathway led through a grove of tall cedars draped with wild vine drooping languidly in the breath of autumn.

Marie was now talking with Mme. Villier, while Reginald walked ahead with Mme. Limerel and described to her the long journey he must make before reaching Assam. At the end of the garden they crossed a bridge over a deep ravine and entered the grounds of the Villa Borghese. The

horizon widened, and the characteristic Roman beauty showed itself in the bolder contours of the landscape, and the soaring lines of the cypresses. Reginald led the way through an ilex avenue, and soon pointed out on the right hand an oval glade, a sort of stadium for races and games, which had been hollowed out in the midst of a grove of lofty stone pines, and surrounded by tall hedges of clipped box, above which a yew tree rose here and there. The arena was framed by four tiers of moss-grown stone steps, with strips of sod between, forming seats for the absent spectators.

"There is the Piazza di Siena," he said. "I have often spent hours here. See what perfect seclusion. How far we seem to be from the noise of the streets."

"It is antique, evidently," said the lady traveller.

"Only a century old, Madame, but the Roman air soon gives that look of grandeur."

A few figures could be seen straying along the distant avenues, looking minute among the trees. The twisted boughs of the pines on the embankment were beginning to turn a rosy hue, but the hollow of the circus was in shadow and the recumbent stones wrapped in their clinging mosses were pallid only from the intensity of shade about them.

In order to rest and enjoy this solitude, the ladies seated themselves on the upper row of seats near the opening, and Reginald remained standing on the knoll above them.

An emotion too strong to be repressed had taken possession of him; at last he approached Marie where she sat beside her mother and said:

"Will you come a little way with me? It will be our last walk together."

She rose at once, and side by side they walked away over the carpet of pine needles, into the shade of the grove.

"You allow it?" asked the friend, and Mme. Limerel replied:

"He is an Englishman and he is leaving to-morrow."

The last walk! What a throng of memories, the slightest and the most remote, were awakened by that cruel word; how they gathered about these two, separating them at once from the whole world! Reginald had already bent over Marie, and was speaking to her in low tones. Stirred as they were by different but dominating emotions, they moved slowly, while every gesture and inflection of their voices was unstudied and spontaneous, the words they exchanged were stripped of every vestige of the human comedy, and had become the breath of two souls without disguise.

For the first time Reginald said: "Mary," and on hearing her name pronounced Marie was more troubled than before. She understood now that she bore no other name in his thoughts.

"Mary, I thank you for having come. You have already played a great part in my life."

"I did not seek it."

"No, but it was a beneficent, a blessed part."

"I should like to have it so."

"You have judged well in all things, Mary. Thank you, once more."

"And yet all your troubles have come through me," she said.

"They might be doubled, for I know their power now. They cannot reach the heights of the soul."

"That is most true."

"And then, when I see you once more, it seems to me that all I have endured is over. You cannot believe with what impatience I have waited for the time when I could speak to you again."

"I, too, have longed for a chance to speak freely with you," she replied.

"I thought of you all last evening."

"And I of you! I admired what you had done."

"How I wish our thoughts might have been the same. You told me of something which has cost you tears, regrets, and hopes. Do you remember your last words to me?"

"I remember."

"You told me you were no longer engaged. For hours and hours I have thought over your words, Mary, and I have resolved to speak to you as I could not have spoken before."

"You are wrong, I fear."

"Do not stop me. Let me speak. I am soon to be so far away from you. I have questioned my heart, in great perplexity at first, afterwards with a sort of calmness and hope. I thought I knew myself, but I did not. You have been in my heart much longer than I was conscious, and doubtless from the first. Thank God I did not

then know what might have turned me aside from my great purpose! And yet you were never to me like other girls. When you were a stranger, a partner at tennis, almost unknown to me, I turned to you in the greatest crisis of my life. What inspired this wonderful confidence?"

"You have already told me," she answered. "It was partly that you attributed to me a soundness of judgment which I have not always for myself, and still more because you thought that we should never meet again."

"Yes, but we have met. Almost in spite of myself I saw you again; my well-weighed plans were broken down, and why? What force drew me up your mother's stairs when I had persisted for days in staying away? Explain to me my obedience to your slightest word; my joy when I am beside you; my deep trouble, as at this moment. I never understood it until last night when thinking over these months which have changed everything within me and around me. Mary, I am sure that I have always loved you, at least a little, but far less than now."

Marie slackened her steps and gazed at him steadily and sadly.

"Reginald," she said, "do not speak to me of a love I cannot share."

"You cannot share it?"

"No, my friend."

She spoke with so deep a pity for the pain she was giving that neither of them could add another word as they walked on, side by side, with bowed heads, their shadows forming but one, which

moved before them down the slope. For they had reached the end of the row of pines, and were passing beneath the ilexes which bound the extremity of the Piazza di Siena. Reginald spoke first:

"I have deceived myself then. You are not the woman I thought you."

His tone had grown harsh. He made no attempt to curb his anger, which was only grief.

"You scorn one who has all the world against him. Yesterday I might have been a man to inspire some interest. To-day I am a mere younger son, a poor subaltern!"

"Ah, do not speak like that! You are ungenerous. You are not yourself at this moment! In truth you might have the right to accuse me if I had ever tried to make you love me, if I had been a thoughtless coquette. But I have nothing of the sort to reproach myself with, as you well know."

"Yes, I know it. But why do you repulse me? Why do you act like other women whom I have not loved? You whom I believed so different! Is it because you could not marry an Englishman? You are fiercely French. Is it that?"

"I am tenderly so, which is a different thing. If you wish to know my real feeling on the subject, I will tell you: I should prefer to marry a Frenchman, but I *could* love a foreigner. Do not doubt it."

"But he would carry you too far away. You are afraid?"

"Oh, no, not that."

"I cannot offer you a brilliant position now. All luxuries, all that makes an easy, attractive life, I have renounced for the present. But I shall at least inherit my father's title. I can exchange and return to England. I could——"

"Reginald, you misunderstand me wholly. I have already answered you."

"It is myself then, my character, my disposition, or my person, that you cannot love? Ah, I had hoped more of this last interview! I am indeed alone since you abandon me!"

"Never! Listen to me!"

Marie spoke in the firm tones of a mother reproving a wilful child. The sunshine cast a golden gleam over her delicate profile.

"You will be able to understand me, you who have a strong religious sense. You have told me your secrets. I owe you mine. I loved Félicien, who has been a friend from childhood. He had admirable qualities, and talents, and inheritances which attached me to him. We seemed destined for each other. But I exacted one condition, the greatest, the most essential for me—that he should share my faith, and he was forced to own to me with tears that he could not fulfil it."

"I remember. We passed a night together—a night of vigil."

"So we parted, and I shall never marry him."

Reginald turned away his face. He hesitated for a moment, but generous youth and imperious kindness carried the day.

"Mary, how could he abandon a faith like his—and a being like you? He is at the age when men

have such splendid resources of energy and are capable of such sudden changes."

"I had hoped for that. I have waited."

He saw that tears were trembling on her lashes, and that she thanked him. In a warmer gleam of sunlight they walked on side by side, and entered the pine-grove on the further side of the arena. They were returning now to their starting-point. Far off they could see the two ladies, making a patch of blackness on the stones and turf.

"Even after that, I tried once more," she said. "I wrote to him. I have already learned how slight the power of love is. Now, all is over, only——"

She stopped and leaned against a pine, with one arm raised above her head, and Reginald stood before her in order that he might look in her face, and as if to prevent her escaping him.

"—Only I have suffered, Reginald."

"I saw it. I compared your look now with what it was formerly."

"I have changed, have I not?"

"That which gives added beauty is a change, too."

"I have been so deeply shaken that I feel I have no right now to accept the love of another. These memories must be dispelled to allow me even to listen. I should feel that I was profaning the tenderness offered me, if a shadow within me mingled with it."

"Sweet soul that you are!"

"I wish to be wholly strong against the past. I wish that there should be no regrets, do you un-

derstand? No dust of shattered affections in the heart I give to him who shall come."

"He has come, Mary."

She made no answer.

"Tell me that I may love you. Then I shall no longer be alone, and I can go away joyful."

Her outstretched arm clasped the tree for support.

"Tell me that I may write to you from out there, and that you will write to me."

She made a gesture of assent and Reginald cried:

"Ah, then you will learn to love me. I am sure of it!"

"I do not wish to know. Are we destined for each other, Reginald, my friend Reginald? Do not let us be carried away by words of weakness. Let us control our hearts which have been sorely tried, and are striving to find consolation. It is for me to fortify and warn you. You are about to leave me, keep yourself free to forget me."

"I do not wish to be free," he pleaded.

"It is not at this last moment that you can speak the first word of love to me—can ask for my promise and pledge me yours. Reginald, we have a nobler farewell to speak to each other—stronger and more worthy of us both."

Marie, as she spoke, wore again the expression she had worn in the woods of Redhall when he had asked her counsels. Her sensitive face grew stronger and finer with all the energy of her race, her noble nature, her purity and power of sustaining others, her pity without weakness, her

spirit of self-sacrifice and of challenge to life, her courage in the hour of difficulty. The eyes which had been filled with tears were now clear and serious, no longer looking into Reginald's to understand, to divine, to follow his thought, but to command in the name of an authority ever present and supreme. As one who through pity forgets her own grief, she had conquered all perplexities, and saw clearly for herself and for him.

"Let us not bid each other adieu under the illusion of a rash tenderness, but in the certainty of a perfect friendship."

And in his turn he made no reply.

"Let us part in mutual gratitude, because we have helped each other to rise."

"You have indeed helped me," he said. "But I?"

"You also. What examples of courage you have given me! That letter last evening! All night I thought of it and reproached myself for my weakness. Truly, if I have the strength to speak to you as I do, it is to you that I owe it! You have led me back into the higher path. I thank you. I shall think of you daily. Nothing can spoil our memory of each other. We have tried to do our duty to each other, and in doing it I believe that we have fulfilled our destiny. Go freely, Reginald, towards the future!"

With an affectionate gesture she took his hand.

"My brother Reginald, I will love you all my life."

He pressed the valiant little hand and said in a scarcely audible tone:

"Yes, all our lives. You have a noble soul, Mary, far nobler than I knew. You are right, for the present at least. But leave me the future. I obey you. I go without a murmur. Adieu."

He was trembling and quite pale. Marie remained standing where he had left her, while he stepped backwards, slowly, still gazing at her through the pines. When he was a few paces off he spoke again, striving to appear master of himself.

"You look too much like her who shared my victory on the day of the tournament—Westgate—little Mary, adieu."

The ruddy sunlight again fell on the brown hair of the colour of ripe chestnut burrs. Reginald paused once more and his lips moved, but his words no longer reached her across the distance that divided them.

Two days later Reginald landed on the blooming quay of Pallanza. The boat was leaving the pier to round the rocky cape and terraced gardens which form one point of the Borromean Bay and divide Lago Maggiore. He sought amidst the crowd of tourists and Italian venders on the pier the friend whom he was amazed not to find awaiting him. The wind which was sweeping down from the Alps reached even this sheltered landing, and rose again in a whirlwind, carrying the dry leaves before it.

Reginald, who knew that the Eden Hotel was situated on the extreme point of the cape, crossed the piazza diagonally, passing the old

houses built on arcades, and had begun climbing the slope lined with villas, into which the carriages from the pier were already turning, when, suddenly, at the opening of the road, an Englishman appeared, running and breathless, waving his arms as he cried:

"How are you, Reginald? I am late, then."

"How are you, Hargreave?"

They gazed at each other intently. Hargreave, taller, thinner, and more awkward than ever, hesitated to appear his jovial self and restrained the broad smile which was habitual with him.

"You look at me as anxiously as if I were recovering from an illness," said Reginald. "My dear fellow, do not worry about me. I am the same man as ever, and am on my way back to service. I sail this evening—unless my father keeps me; in that case I shall go to-morrow. How is he?"

"Wonderfully well. This climate suits him."

"So much the better. He has not seemed too much concerned?"

Fully restored to himself, Hargreave drew Reginald rapidly along, and as they ascended the hill, went on with increasing animation:

"He? His best friends, like myself, fail to comprehend the complicated mechanism of his mind. I know what he is doing, but I have no idea what he is thinking, when he chooses to keep it to himself! I can only assure you that he is leading an active life, and one according to his tastes. He has a little white boat rigged as a sloop, in which we sail back and forth across the lake.

She is a swift sailer, Reginald, and serves very well for fishing. We fish for the char but your father is particularly enthusiastic over the trout. He considers them a thousand times prettier and more delicious than those of Lago di Garda, which are brown-scaled, as you know. Here they flash in the water like sunbeams, and have a very delicate flavour, especially when seasoned with old Lesa wine. The mountains here offer hundreds of excursions, but your father tires more easily than formerly. He has joined the skating club which owns an artificial pond over yonder, behind the Crocetta estate. In short, the place seems very favourable to your father's health. But I have no notion as to his state of mind concerning you, nor as to what sort of a welcome you will receive."

"He got my letter?"

"Yes, the day before yesterday, while he was taking his coffee on the terrace. The chasseur brought only one, and I recognised your handwriting. Sir George tore it open and glanced at the first line, then thrust it hastily into his vest pocket, saying: 'I have received bad news, Hargreave. You won't leave me this afternoon, will you?' We took a long, a very long walk. He seemed sad, and once or twice I thought he was about to speak to me of you. But no, nothing! And yet he said, 'You won't leave me?'"

They followed the path, which was bordered by tropical plants of every variety, while through the branches of the trees they caught glimpses of the blue mountains across the lake.

"I will go on ahead and find him," said Hargreave, "and tell him that you are here awaiting his answer."

Reginald laid his hand on his old friend's arm, saying:

"Be sure and add that I submit to his orders and only ask for one thing: to see him, even without exchanging a word, to see him if only for a moment."

Hargreave's face expressed sympathy, mingled with regret and reproach, such as one feels for wasted heroism.

"Brave boy!" he said. "I don't understand you, but I have a weakness for you, all the same."

"Tell him, also, that my affection for him is unchanged, that my respect has never wavered.

Hargreave went on alone, repeating to himself like a refrain:

"Redhall! Redhall! The future lord of Redhall awaiting justice from his father!"

Sir George was sitting in the glazed gallery of the hotel reading the newspaper, with his back to the light. Contrary to his habit, he allowed Hargreave to open the door and come in without accosting him, without seeming aware of his friend's presence. Hargreave approached, raising his shoulders and contracting the muscles of his long neck, which, with him, was a sign of embarrassment.

"There is some one outside, my dear fellow, who would like to see you, only to see you, even without speaking a word."

The hands holding the newspaper trembled so violently that Sir George let it drop lest the rattling of the sheet should be audible, as he said:

"Ah, really! I suspected as much."

"He has come a long way."

"I did not invite him."

"He is waiting in the road. If you refuse to see him, it will cause him great pain."

"He is younger than I to bear his pain!"

"And he will take the next boat——"

"He is quite free to do so."

And with these words the old baronet sprang to his feet, red with anger.

"Does he bring me excuses? No, I am sure not. You cannot say that he offers any, and if you did I should not believe you; he is my son. Then why do you expect me to change? He knew what he was doing. So do I! You can bring him in, Hargreave, but I shall not be here. If he asks you where I am, you can say that I had a rush of blood to the head, and needed to take the air."

And with hasty steps Sir George crossed the gallery and entered the adjoining salon, slamming the door behind him.

Hargreave walked out of the hotel, bitterly regretting that he had consented to be the bearer of messages between these two. He followed the little path bordered by palms and ferns until he caught sight of Reginald, when feeling powerless to speak to him, to comfort him, to be a witness of his youthful sorrow, he made a despairing gesture, saying with arms and head and eyes:

"It is useless. I have done your errand badly. I have not succeeded. Do not come!"

On the deck of the steamboat, half an hour later, Reginald Breynolds was seeking for a spot whence he could distinguish most clearly, and for the longest time, the house where his father had refused to receive him. He found at last a place in the bow, outside the awning which was flapping in the breeze. The whole surface of the lake from north to south was furrowed by the wind, and quivering with life and light; the sun was just sinking behind the mountains. The boat sounded her whistle and put off, rounding first the little island of San Giovanni, which lies opposite Pallanza, and then the cape, upon whose terraces the foliage scarcely stirred. Next she headed straight to windward a few hundred yards from the shore, which here sent out a succession of long spurs into the lake as far as the eye could distinguish them in the rising mist. Reginald strove intently to make out which of the closed windows in the great square building on the height might hide the figure of Sir George, which curtain might be lifted for a moment and then let fall again.

He was no longer troubled; he had accepted the ordeal and did not rebel. The *Sempione* was making good speed; it would soon be difficult to distinguish the outlines of a man's figure on the hotel balconies. They had already passed the cliffs of San Remigio, bright with geraniums, the shores were growing flatter, the little town and

beach of Intra were just coming in sight when Reginald started, and with a rapid gesture raised his hat from his head. From the shelter of a rock a white skiff glided out and bore down on the *Sempione*, carrying so much sail that she careened before the wind. A man held the tiller, an old man, sitting very upright.

All the passengers rose to see how close the sloop would cross the track of the steamer. She passed so near as to graze the hull. For an instant Reginald saw the small blue eyes beneath their white lashes fixed upon his; then the sloop, caught in a sudden gust, veered away from the steamship, which was running straight for Locarno. She did not turn again. But invisible, leaning half-way across the gunwale, separated already by distance, by the light mist and the oncoming darkness from the big boat, old Sir George still peered out to catch her dim outline. Then as night descended, he saw only one of her side-lights like a little star skimming the surface of the water.

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